Chronicles of Westerly

A Provincial Sketch

By the Author of

"CULMSHIRE FOLK"—"JOHN ORLEBAR"—Etc.

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CHRONICLES OF WESTERLY

"Euerie man dwellynge on this Æarth is a pilgrym eyther towardes Blesse or els towards Payne."—Sir JOHN OLDCASTLE.

"Human portraits faithfully drawn are of all pictures the welcomest."—THOMAS CARLYLE.

"Grief and joy and hope and fear
Play their pageants everywhere."
—THOMAS CAMPION.

CHRONICLES OF WESTERLY

A PROVINCIAL SKETCH

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'CULMSHIRE FOLK,'
'JOHN ORLEBAR,' 'THE YOUNG IDEA,'
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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CHRONICLES OF WESTERLY:

A PROVINCIAL SKETCH.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAJOR-GENERAL.

"Non illo melior quisquam nec amantior æqui
Vir fuit."
—OVID.

THE departure of the gallant Do-or-Dies and the advent of their successors in Westerly was a double event, which of course created no small stir; but the commotion was a mere trifle as compared with the wild excitement caused by the projected scheme set on foot and advertised by the speculating Joe Hinch. It caused an upheaval. It was

audaciously startling — deliciously novel, something quite out of the beaten track. It was in the nature of a new sensation; and there was a delicious smack of something loose and wild about it, which gave it an added and mysterious charm.

Iteration had taken the gloss off the going and coming of troops; which at the best was mainly interesting to the lower orders, and to the gentler sex. The well-to-do youth of the upper and middle had no sympathy with the garish cloth which threw the civilian black into the background, and led beauty captive, and sometimes, it must be owned, astray. Here was promise of excitement of an unwonted description; a novelty which, moreover, had in it elements of possible fortunes to be won by judicious bookmaking. Westerly was to become, in fact, a second Derby, or at least a Doncaster. The knowing ones who began to turn up, wearing hats on three hairs, and light pants,

could tell you a lot more than I could; and give "tips" which I, as a mere outsider, am quite ignorant of. They discussed the situation most affably with the inhabitants, round corners, and in bar-parlours and snuggeries in all directions. They were ready at a moment's notice to enter into the mysteries, and to initiate any one interested. So free and affable were they that the youth of Westerly quite took to them off-hand.

The project was the topic of conversation in every circle, high and low. It is a notorious fact that among toilers and moilers a big thing is done every year in betting. The fascinations of it must be irresistible. How often do we see the first downward step taken, to gratify the gambling propensity, by an otherwise promising son, who robs his father's till to bet; or by the bank-clerk who helps himself to a fiver, in the feverish hope of making it again fifty times over; and yet he has had his hands dabbling

in gold for years without any of it sticking to his fingers till this cursed prompting comes. Old Thomas Fuller remarks upon the strange fact that such a noble animal as the horse should make rogues of those who are associated with him. What was true in this quaint author's time is true still, only more so.

The big names in the syndicate dazzled everybody. If Joe Hinch could placard himself all over the dead walls of Westerly bracketed with lords and baronets, it must be all right; for is it not an admitted, a proverbial fact, that men are known by the company they keep? It never struck the Westerly folk that this argument cut both ways; because, having had no previous experience in these matters, they had no idea that among the upper ten there are occasionally to be found both rogues and fools.

Joe Hinch knew what he was about.

If you want a real rich luxuriant crop of

wild oats, always go for virgin soil. His genius was apparent to any man of the world reading between the lines; and he did not—as less experienced persons might do—overlook the difficulties. In ploughing up this virgin soil he would meet a boulder or two beneath the surface, as he had often done before. Scottowe had not overrated him in the estimate given to the major; for evidently when Hinch took a thing in hand, and went in for it, he was hard to beat. His philosophy was summarised into the perverted maxim, "Do others, or you will certainly be done by them"; his motto was "Thorough"; and his practice was, always to be up before the social worm—for which he had the profoundest contempt but the keenest appetite.

He seemed to be well on towards success before his natural enemies became fully alive to the moral dangers of the situation; but at last they did wake up in earnest, and

showed fight in a manner which somewhat surprised him. Sides were taken, and the opposition fell into line with a promptness which was dangerous. The ultra-pious section of the community held up its hands and lifted up its voice in collective horror at the flood of iniquity which must of necessity be let loose upon the town. But the temptation was great for backsliders; and the weak-kneed were found to be alarmingly many. Hinch appealed not only to the inherent love of pleasure, but to the inherent love of gain. Gilded youth, and youth without gilding, was to incontinently enjoy itself; fortunes were to be made by tradesmen, hotel proprietors, lodging-house keepers, jarveys, stablemen, farmers — everybody: this was his and the common-sense way of looking at it. On the other hand, said his opponents, there would be riot, debauchery, swindling, swearing—the devil, in fact, let loose, and altogether master of the situation;

to which the knowing ones retorted with a contemptuous "Pish!"

Hinch bought up one of the newspapers —the 'Westerly Daily News'—at the start, by a big standing advertisement and a contract for printing posters. If he divided his patronage he would have secured two half-hearted supporters: this did not suit his motto of "Thorough." His plan always was to take one paper first, secure it, and after it had written him up in such a way as to render it impossible to retract and write him down, then to negotiate with the other which had previously abused him, and whose conversion would thus carry all the greater weight. The more bitter number two was in the beginning, the better for Hinch later on; and the more crushing would be the collapse of the party which had relied on it for support.

The 'Westerly Standard' having been left out in the cold on this occasion, its editor

lost no time. He called immediately on Major-General the Honourable Bynge-Hudson, R.E., arranged the best terms he could, and "went for" Hinch and the syndicate without delay in the leader columns and the correspondence portion of his paper.

The major-general occupied a peculiar position in Westerly. He was at the head of every religious movement, and was highly esteemed by the Bishop. He was a solemn and important personage. He was actually eighty, but you would have guessed his age as under seventy. He was rich. He had done a good deal for Westerly in his own way, because if he didn't get his own way he would do nothing. He was a man of influence, as a matter of course, and one with the courage of his convictions. He was a Plymouth brother, and therefore did not believe in bishops or parsons in their official capacity—if I may use the phrase without being considered flippant: he judged them

as men. But this gap in his creed was no more than the loss of a back-tooth to a dog who was otherwise well set up in molars. There were various weighty reasons why the Church should hold on to him, and it did.

The theory exists in the army, I believe, that a retired Engineer officer always ranks under one of the three M.'s. He is either mad, married, or a Methodist. As he was a widower, the M. in the major-general's case may be safely said—from a soldier's standpoint—to cover, under the head of Methodism, the peculiar views of the Plymouth Brethren, and therefore to classify the Honourable Bynge-Hudson sufficiently correctly for all practical purposes, or at all events quite near enough to prove the rule. Mind you I put forward this M. theory on the statement of soldiers whom I have known, but who were—I am in fairness bound to admit—cavalry men, whose dicta with regard to other branches of the service

should be received, perhaps, with some reservation. I should myself not be inclined to go so far as these cavalry men; but should rather maintain that the retired R.E. is invariably a man with a fad.

Old Major-General Bynge-Hudson had suffered much and gone through much; but he had lived so long, that nearly all his relatives had died out; and the few remaining ones, who were not blest with his strong vitality, did not remember him or keep up acquaintance. His profession necessitated absence and change for many years; and when he settled down and retired, he selected Westerly, because the inhabitants were all strangers to him, and would not, as his relatives might, rake up, out of mistaken kindness, any buried portions and parcels of the dreadful past.

Fulfilling one of the obligations of the three M.'s, he married, at twenty-two, the daughter of his impecunious colonel. She

died, leaving him two boys and a daughter, whom he idolised as the counterpart of her mother. The daughter died at seventeen. These terrible blows were followed by the death in one of the West Indian Islands of his eldest son, a lieutenant in his own corps, "of whom no praise could be an exaggeration," so wrote a brother officer; and he spoke within the limits of truth, for young Bynge-Hudson was handsome, manly, honourable, clever, and all these without a particle of uppishness or pride. Many a tear had the old soldier shed in secret over all his troubles, but there was comfort in them; and he braced himself up with a proud reserve, and went on doing his duty, with all his love and hope centred on the last of his race—his second son. This son crushed him—nearly broke his heart, turned out a profligate and a spendthrift, threw up his commission and disappeared, a disgraced and disreputable offshoot

of the parent stem. The poor father, when the news came, bowed his head upon the table, and wept as he had not wept before—tears as it were of blood and fire. No one, I take it, can tell what agony he suffered, except one who has had a like experience, under similar conditions. To the natural affections of a father there were added intense family pride, and the knowledge that this only remaining son had in him talents and qualities which could not have failed to render him distinguished, but for the fatal moral blemish which overshadowed and dominated them. This son had utterly disappeared. For twenty-five or thirty years he heard nothing of him, except a rumour that he had been shot in a drunken row in San Francisco, or somewhere else. The brave old man lived through all his troubles; and what wonder if he was driven—not to drink, he was too much of a gentleman for that, but to some equivalent and less ignoble

excitement? He retired, took up his abode in Westerly, and went in for the last of the three M.'s. He became a Plymouth brother; and infused new life into the movement, which had begun to languish somewhat before he settled down to the work.

There were various reasons why Bishop Quodlibet should be hail-fellow-well-met with the major-general; in fact it was only in accordance with the fitness of things. Both belonged to the "upper crust"—one by right of office, and the other by birth. Both were born rulers of men. Each could make it hot for the other; but both were by instinct gentlemen, so they did not fight, but preserved an armed neutrality, and a friendly intercourse socially.

At a hastily summoned preliminary meeting of the leading citizens who were "on the Lord's side"—as the 'Westerly Standard' advertisement phrased it—it was unanimously carried that the major-general, who was in

the chair, should without delay seek a private interview with the Bishop, for the purpose of taking "immediate and effective steps to stem this torrent of depravity, the flood-gates of which were so soon to be let loose upon the town." I quote the exact words of Mr Emerson Digley, the worthy grocer of High Street, whose business success depended mainly upon the joint goodwill of the major-general and the Bishop; because, obviously, these two with their followings comprised the local community. His proposal was warmly seconded by Mr Henry Spalding, also of the High Street, butcher—a comparatively new-comer, who was driven by force of circumstances to take sides, though he had been for some time uncertain. But his rival, Wilson, had openly gone over to the enemy, and had taken shares, and actually been put on the local race committee among all the swells. Being a man now of great wealth, derived from a long-stand-

ing and an almost exclusive trade, a breeder of horses and prize stock, and fond of sport, this Wilson could afford to do as he liked.

Spalding had his way to make. He did a good and clever stroke of business when he told the major-general before the meeting began, and as a strict secret, how this Wilson had publicly said that old Bynge-Hudson, the Bishop, Canon Fungus, and the whole sanguinary lot might go to—I can't repeat the language—a warm place; for that the game would be "won in spite of 'em." He forgot, or at all events did not add, how Wilson had said, "If they preferred carrion to good meat, they were welcome to deal with Henry Spalding for it." This was outside the point at issue, and Spalding was quite justified—conveying, as it did, a foul aspersion on both man and meat—in substituting words of more solemn import from the recesses of his own breast, and which were likely to tell to advantage. "'He

that is not with me,' General, 'is against me.'"

"Clearly—quite so—hem!" said the old soldier, with something like a sneer.

It always gave the major-general the fidgets to hear any one else quoting texts. I don't know why: he seemed somehow to think they were his by right; and in his heart he hated traders as traders, though as units with souls to be saved he loved them. This is a distinction which I have often heard stated, but could never quite understand: I leave it.

He was a courageous old chap, as those knew who had served under or with him; and even now, in his white old age, his eye sparkled, and his blood ran quicker and warmer at the prospect of even local social war. He liked the excitement of conflict; it made him feel young, even though the sensation went perilously close to second childhood. The "Church mili-

tant" was a phrase he loved; and it was a treat to hear him join in the hymn "Onward! Christian soldiers," with which the proceedings opened. The uncomfortable *post mortem* quarters to which Wilson had assigned him, even though in good company, were precisely those which he had laboured hard, both in season and out of season, to avoid; and it was not likely that he would tamely submit to being consigned thereto—like a bale of goods with a label on—by a "confounded butcher." In his early youth he would not have selected so lengthy an expletive. But we linger too long over mere trifles.

The major-general rose amid rounds of applause; and, when silence was restored, he went at once to business.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I accept the trust you have reposed in me. I accept it with pride and pleasure, though I feel that you could easily have selected a better man."

Cries of "No! no!"

"Yes," he said, with lowering eyebrows, "selected a better man." He never allowed himself to be contradicted privately or publicly. "Excuse me. I insist on this point before I proceed," and he presented his first finger at the audience as though it were a pistol-barrel.

The audience took the hint, and let him have his way.

"You could, I repeat, have selected a better — a far better man, but — no man more sincere. There are some points on which I will give place to no one. What I say I mean, and what I undertake I will carry through or perish in the attempt." Then he moved his coat-tails and sat down.

There were thunders of applause. Ultimately it was settled that the whole thing, at this stage, should be left in the hands of the major-general. He was in his own person to form a deputation to the Bishop,

representing thus the concentrated essence of opinion, as expressed at this preliminary meeting.

He lost no time in presenting himself at the episcopal palace, which was a good way out of town. He covered the distance, next morning, at a quick march, notwithstanding his great age, all the way. The Bishop expected him, having had early intimation of his mission from the Rev. Septimus Stole, who despatched his curate, poor Tinkler, at 8 o'clock, with a copy of the newspaper, marked, for his lordship to digest at breakfast. He was in his study when the major-general came, apparently profoundly engaged with some old folio—possibly one of "The Fathers."

"I am rejoiced to see you, General," he said, rising and shaking hands warmly; "be seated." And with the episcopal hands he placed a chair opposite to himself for his visitor.

"You are very kind," responded the stately old soldier. "You will excuse my calling at this early hour."

"You are welcome, General, at any hour." There was here a mutual bow. It was not a fact, but still it was a compliment the soldier felt, and as such had to be acknowledged in some way; but as a mere compliment he did not think it worth a reply more explicit than an expression of a lively sense of his lordship's kindness. After these preliminaries, they got their chairs closer together by degrees, and settled down to business.

The Bishop had, on more than one occasion before this, fallen in for some share of abuse from his clergy behind his back for "allowing himself to be led" by, instead of leading, old Bynge-Hudson—notably so in reference to lay preaching and to certain mission services; but still he didn't seem to profit by his experience, or to mind

much one way or other. The fact was simply that, while his inferiors were jealous he was altogether without envy, and didn't grudge the General his triumphs over the ungodly. So Stole, who was, as we know, an arch-High-Churchman, was in duty bound to swallow the bitter pill as administered by his ordained superior; and Canon Fungus and all the cathedral dignitaries, for the same reason, did as the Bishop's private chaplain did; while the outsiders, for various reasons and motives of different degrees and weight, had, as a matter of expediency, to follow suit. Mrs Fungus was, as we also know, of the Lapsus family in the peerage, and had once vaguely hinted at a connection between it and the Bynge-Hudsons; which on being told to the General by a would-be toady, resulted in the most violently unchristian outburst, on his part, that had ever escaped him (and of which he was heartily ashamed), with regard to the

females of that illustrious house. But this by the way. His heterodox views did not detract from the high estimation in which he was held by the simple-minded Tinkler, who regarded him, secretly, as one to worship and honour and look up to, as a man of sterling worth and piety. To Stole he was a wolf in sheep's clothing, to Tinkler a veritable hero, a child of God, even though he did not believe in the laying on of hands which had made Tinkler what he was. Stole's mission was to prate of our spiritual mother — the true Church; while Tinkler accepted the utterly unorthodox dictum of the author of 'Sheep Folds,' "Wherever one hand meets another helpfully, that is the only true mother Church which ever was or ever shall be." Between these two human extremes of High and Low there was a fluid mass which took shape or ran into jelly, according to the theological temperature of the Episcopate. As we said, Dr

Quodlibet respected and loved the fellow-worker who carried on his mining operations against the citadel of sin with uncompromising bravery and rectitude.

"He is with us, my dear Stole," his lordship would say, "at least in the estimation of the enemy, if not in yours; let us remember this, and be thankful also. If he differs on some non-vital points, he differs as a true gentleman."

"There is much in all this, of course, my lord," Stole replies, feeling himself all the time to be relatively, like Canon Fungus, of the hereditary elect. "Still our ordination—our divine commission——"

"Yes, yes; of course. But looking at these things from the highest point of view, we are all, surely, more or less commissioned. The General holds, at all events, beyond all question, brevet rank in the Army of Gawd."

This being so settled by constituted auth-

ority, there was nothing more to be said by a dutiful son of the Church; or if there was, he was too dutiful to utter it. But how if the differences were vital after all?

It must not be denied that there were strong grounds for the alarm felt by Stole, Fungus, and others, at the influence which the major-general had over the Bishop in things non-secular; for not only did he, with Tinkler, accept the dictum which we have given from 'Sheep Folds,' but the further explanation and amplification as given by its distinguished author: "Your sectarian of every species, small and great, Catholic or Protestant, of High Church or Low, in so far as they think themselves in the right and others in the wrong, these are the true fog children, bodies of putrescent vapour and skin, blown bagpipes for the fiends to pipe with." It is not a pleasant thing or a safe thing to associate

on terms of equality socially with a man who looks upon you spiritually as a body of putrescent vapour, or as a blown bagpipe for devils' music.

I cannot here resist the parenthetical remark on my own account, irrelevant though it be, that I am of the same opinion as the great writer above quoted—namely, that if there be music at all in the infernal regions, it must be Scotch: the passage seems to imply as much.

The result of the major-general's visit was satisfactory to himself at least. He hurried back to the town with the information that the Bishop would receive and confer with the deputation next day, so that no precious time should be lost. He did not stop to think how much the sour grapes element entered into the estimate formed of him by the smaller luminaries that revolved round the Bishop. Theology and carpology are very near akin.

In any case, shall we not laugh, my friend—you and I? Even the great and serious Lycurgus had statuettes of Mirth in every chamber. It does not follow that we are ill-natured because we are amused, or sour because we are sharp—even at other people's expense—though it is a common mistake which other people are prone to make in judging us, particularly if we have the evil reputation of being satirical; and yet those "other people" are not more mistaken in their diagnosis than we are, sometimes, when we think ourselves ultra-cute. "It is the chief stronghold of our hypocrisy to be ever judging one another," says Milton; and none of us escape, or altogether overcome the tendency to criticise our neighbours—which has, it must be owned, great satisfaction in it.

But whether the sense of enjoyment is most keen among the malignant or among the humane, is a question which I do not

pretend to determine — any more than I could pretend to determine whether the hungry hound or the fully fed master of the pack goes for the fox with the greater gusto.

CHAPTER II.

A DUBIOUS POINT SETTLED.

"A doubtful trembling seized me first all o'er,
Then wishes and a warmth unknown before.
What followed was all ecstasy."
—DRYDEN.

"For these women be all such madde pieuishe elues,
They will not be wonne except it please them selues."
—NICHOLAS UDALL.

THE most exquisite, the most intense unrest, is by the superficial or the uninitiated often mistaken for repose. The child at first believes its humming-top to be more alive when it goes blundering noisily, banging madly against table and chairs, than when it stands erect, steadily revolving on its axis. Our mental growth makes havoc of our crude conclusions. And when the adult goes from tops to theories—takes, perhaps, to reading

Herbert Spencer—he begins to see the logical dangers that beset a want of a due both-sidedness; nay, more, he then discovers that not only are there both sides to every question, but a great many sides, and that, after all, inconclusion is the nearest approach to finality.

Aunt Polly began to be puzzled by Lavinia; and in contemplating her perplexity, I have naturally been led into the above remarks. Hitherto the good soul had only seen the humming-top, so to speak, in its peripatetic and unsteady stages; and the sudden change to quiescence, reserve, and calm, troubled her. Was it incipient illness, or what?

Gradually aunt Polly ranged herself on the side of those philosophers who start with a basis of experience; and arguing by a process of induction, she arrived at a pretty correct solution of the difficulty. Mr Samuel Pipperly had, if the truth must be told (and there is really no reason why it should not),

been sedulously playing a little game with aunt Polly as the principal figure; and, with the side-light which this fact let in upon her understanding, she was able to read between the lines — to diagnose very correctly the symptoms of disturbance exhibited by her niece. Putting two and two together, she reached a correct quotient in mental arithmetic; and she wisely deemed it prudent rather to await developments than to discuss possible issues with the person most interested.

The two sat together in a window of the large up-stairs drawing-room of the bank-house; aunt Polly knitting sedulously; the morning sun lighting up that lovely hair of Lavinia's, which Lieutenant Fitz had so irreverently called red, while she sat with her head resting against the shutter—her hands lying idly clasped together in her lap.

There had been several spasmodic efforts at conversation made by the elder woman,

but the keynote had not been struck, for the simple reason that there was constraint; both felt it, and aunt Polly was wary. She was not an adept, and she feared to touch the chords of that most delicate of instruments —the young heart that throbbed so loud she could almost hear it. Silence seemed natural, and more safe than chatter.

Gradually there stole upon them a sense of outside motion and bustle, a noise of increasing activity in the streets—the buzz of voices, the clatter of feet. Aunt Polly, sticking her needles into the ball of worsted and impaling these on the work she was doing, got up and looked out.

"I think I hear a band, Lavinia dear. Yes, I do—faintly, in the distance."

"Ah!" said Lavinia, still motionless and listless.

"Oh yes, look! The people are all running, just as if they had never seen a soldier in their lives before!"

"You dear inconclusive old thing!" said Lavinia.

Aunt Polly looked round with a smile. "Well, to be sure, you are complimentary."

"I'm very rude—I shouldn't have called you old. But you don't mind."

"Not a bit!"

"But you are inconclusive all the same."

"Why?"

"It is just because they *have seen* soldiers before that they—want to see them again."

"Just get up and look," said aunt Polly.

"And you are just as bad as the rest," said Lavinia, rising and putting an arm round aunt Polly.

The music came nearer, and grew more distinct. The Do-or-Dies were rapidly approaching, and would soon be in sight. Aunt Polly felt the girl's heart beat with alarming force. Suddenly the regiment, turning the corner at the top of the High Street, made its appearance, headed by the band—a good

way off still; and as suddenly aunt Polly turned instinctively, feeling that there was "something wrong." As she did so, the colour faded from Lavinia's face, and she became wan; the pent-up feelings giving utterance to a deep sigh. She would have dropped, only for the strong arms that held her up.

"Move away, darling," she said, "out of—the hot sun." And she led Lavinia to the sofa. "Let me run and get you the smelling-salts, or a glass of water, child."

"No, no! I shall be all right in a moment. Oh aunt! dear aunt!" she exclaimed after a pause. "I am such a fool! such an utter fool!"

"Fool, child—nonsense! You never were anything of the sort."

"Oh! indeed, indeed I am!" still more vehemently and passionately; "I am! I am!"

Aunt Polly looked scared, and no wonder,

there was such a strange, distant, far-away look in the eyes she gazed at.

"You are over-excited, my dear," she said; "your nerves are unstrung. You are quite upset, I can see. We'll have Dr Collyrium round by-and-by."

"I don't want him."

"Yes, you do. You have over-taxed your strength. You haven't, in fact, got over that ball yet."

It was true in more senses than one, they both felt.

"No," said Lavinia, speaking with a touching mournfulness, "I have not got over it—nor shall I ever. Oh, never! never!"

With startling vehemence she uttered the last words, hid her face on aunt Polly's breast, and burst into tears, which came with a copiousness calculated to seriously damage the body of the dress on which they fell; but all the same the kind soul let her weep, feeling that it was fit and safe to have "a good

cry," and moreover, not quite knowing what else to do at the moment.

The band was playing that charming soldier's tune—

> "Wrap me up in my old stable jacket,
> And say a poor buffer lies low, lies low."

The troops were only a few yards away.

"My dear child," said the good creature, after a pause, "you must not give way. Get up, and don't spoil your eyes. I must go and have a look. There! come. Well, very well! I'll go and see for myself if you won't. Oh, here they are! There's the dear old colonel, looking as proud as Punch, and Captain Tiptop, and—and—yes—see. Oh, there's Major Tynte! He's stopping. What is it? Why, I do declare he's—he's making signs—he's, yes, he really is coming across! Lavinia, run, child, and let him in!"

"Are you crazed, aunt Polly? Let him ring."

But aunt Polly disobeyed the order; and,

after acknowledging the salutation, she sped down-stairs, regardless of consequences, and with an agility which would have done credit to a child of ten.

Lavinia, with fingers interlaced, and hands pressed hard against her palpitating heart, sat upright, and with a vigorous effort of will recovered her self-control. There was a momentary feeling of mental tension, painfully oppressive while it lasted, but she conquered it; and with a woman's instinct—which is not necessarily vanity—she looked to her eyes and hair in the big circular mirror opposite to where she sat. There is no woman worthy of the name who would not, I stoutly maintain, have, under the circumstances, looked at herself. The impulse is not only pardonable but creditable, since it springs from the wish to make the best of one's self, and is the reverse of indifference.

Down-stairs there was a warm greeting, and an animated conversation while it lasted.

The few moments gave her time to recruit her courage. Aunt Polly knew the value of, and the necessity for, this interval, and she purposely prolonged it. Presently the footsteps reached the stairs, and here there was another short parley, as the voices became more distinct.

"May I see her?" said the major; "she will not be offended, will she?"

"Not a bit in the world," said the cheery old lady. "I'll answer for that. Of course you haven't time to stand on ceremony."

"But I might simply have left this with you," said the major.

Aunt Polly declined to take charge of the letter. "You had better give it her yourself," she said, going up before him.

"Well," said the major, "if you will ask her to grant me just one moment. I have to beg of her to do me a favour. She is so kind, I am sure I may trespass on her good-nature."

This speech brought them to the landing of the drawing-room door. The heart inside beat loud and fast.

"She will do anything for you—for anybody," said aunt Polly; "she is so kind and good." The latter part of the little speech was added as a sort of set-off to the beginning, which she thought too exclusive under the circumstances to be quite the thing, or to be uttered without a saving clause, which made it general in its application.

"Will you announce me?"

"Oh, you may go in," responded aunt Polly, opening the door as she spoke. "Lavinia, dear, here is Major Tynte to say good-bye. I'll be back in a moment or two."

Was it very wrong to shut the door and leave them together? Of course it was highly improper; and strange to say, though I am a very strict person on such points as this, I am so inconsistent as to like aunt Polly all the better. She didn't even wait on the

landing, but went all the way down-stairs again, and sat quite still in the front sitting-room, with her hands clasped together in her lap, waiting and watching. If she had caught one of the servants, or Samuel Pipperly himself on the way up, she would have stopped him at the risk of her life. She saw it all now, dear soul, and was so glad and sorry that she really did not know whether to laugh or cry, and so did neither.

"Miss Harman," said the major, holding out his hand, which she took with a kindly smile, "if I came only on my own account and for personal reasons at this unconscionable hour, I should need to apologise—and particularly after our last meeting—but I do not; I—I——" He spoke with a manifest effort, which was pathetic, and moved her.

"I am very glad to see you, major," was all she could say.

"Well," he said, "I don't deserve that

you should be; but it is a great comfort to hear you say so, because I felt most fully the force and the absolute justness of the reproof you administered to me quite recently. It was not manly of me to play a waiting game, and recklessly too, at the last moment, with—with—an uncertain hand. It is kind of you to forgive and forget."

"I have nothing to forgive, and I did not say anything about forgetting, major," she said, with a calmness which led him to a wrong conclusion.

"Ah!" he replied, "you are so good that I am sure you will at least read my actions as favourably as they can be read after—after I am gone."

"I will," she said; "you may rest assured of that."

"Thanks," he said. He was embarrassed still by the same misleading calmness. "I—I—did not quite know that I should see you to-day. I did not feel that I had a

right to call specially, so I have written here full particulars of a sad story, with the details of which I became acquainted unexpectedly at the last moment. It concerns a woman in dire distress. I knew that this fact would in itself appeal forcibly to you; but there are other facts which will touch you, as—as—they have touched me, you—you are so kind and good." He did not see how, by implication, he was lauding himself, but went on bravely. "I ask a very great favour—I know and feel that; but I have a firm conviction, as I said before, that I shall not appeal to you in vain."

"I will do all I can—for you—major," she replied. "I will do it with pleasure. It will be a very great gratification if I can be of any service to any one in whom you take an interest." There was a change of tone which gave him comfort.

"Thank you again—a thousand times. The story is too long to tell; and unfortun-

ately my time is short—so short! But you will find all in this formidable document—I mean all about this case. And now I must bid you—farewell!"

He raised his eyes to her expressive face, as he stood before her, the perfection of a manly, honourable, and handsome soldier. There came suddenly into the heart of each a rush — an overwhelming rush of feeling fraught with all the pathos of uncertainty and all the terrible possibilities of the future. Should they never meet again? Ah! the torture, the tension, the agony of it—the pity of it! And so, and thus the supreme moment had come. There was no time now to temporise or to trifle with it: it was—Fate! By a sudden impulse he held out both hands, and instantly her head was on his breast, and she was clasped in the warm embrace that told in silent stillness the secret so long concealed. "My darling!" he said at last, "this is indeed an immeas-

urable joy — a joy which I had hungered for, but had given up all hope of tasting. Mine! mine! mine!" and he kissed the dear lips again and again, and yet again, to corroborate the fact of possession. She did not speak, she was so sadly happy—poor Lavinia!

Aunt Polly moved unquietly in her chair down-stairs, as if by some subtle process the current of excited feeling had been conveyed to her through the floor and ceiling. She felt by instinct—there is no other way of accounting for the fact—that things were coming right up-stairs; and the kind soul waited patiently for developments.

Time was short, and the moments golden and precious beyond price. The major made the most of them. It is not fair for us to intrude or to record too minutely the remainder of the parting scene.

Aunt Polly caught the last words as he opened the drawing-room door: these were

enough, and it was well. "I shall be back," he said; "don't fear. Keep up a good heart, and don't be frightened. There isn't really much danger; and the General has actually undertaken to finish the whole thing in a few weeks with the present reinforcements."

Die! He had no notion now of death. He felt as if he had taken a new lease of life; and the idea that a brush with King Cocoa and his wild warriors could end his happiness, just so newly born, could not be entertained for an instant. There was no room for it in the flying moments. There was a last silent embrace, and then another last one, more hurried still; and as he ran lightly down-stairs aunt Polly met him with a beaming countenance in the hall.

"Good-bye," he said; "God bless you a thousand times!" He felt that somehow he owed all his luck to her; and, in his gratitude, he went as near kissing her too

as it was possible to go without actually committing himself by an indiscretion, which the good soul would have heartily forgiven, as readily as would her niece.

She saw the major out, and then with amazing agility rushed up-stairs, to find Lavinia prone upon the sofa with her face buried in the soft cushion, crying as though her heart would break. She took the girl's hand in hers, and sat there patiently by her side till the paroxysm was over; knowing that it was good for the poor heart to weep, and that, after all, it would probably not break.

At last relief came, and things began to mend, as was manifest by the sudden uprising of the patient, and the vigorous expression of her conviction that aunt Polly was the dearest, kindest soul in the wide world—an assertion emphasised by a resounding kiss.

"Well, to be sure!" was the semi-cred-

ulous but cheery response, after she had with both hands rearranged her head-gear which had been seriously "disrupted" by the proceedings.

"Since when, I wonder?"

"Since always," was the very illogical rejoinder.

"Stuff, my dear,—all stuff! Get up and walk about now; it will do you good. Here! come along."

They paraded the room silently together—up and down, backwards and forwards twice, with an arm round each other's waist. Coming suddenly to a halt before one of the mirrors, an idea seemed suddenly to strike the elder.

"Just look!" she said; "why, we are actually, I do declare, just exactly like an engaged couple. How absurd!" They were near the door at the moment. "Do you know, what, Lavinia?—the major has actually taken away the small photo in the

little bronze frame. It was there—I saw it this morning;" and she put her hand on the angle bracket covering the blank where it used to stand.

"Oh, aunt, how unkind! Why did you give it him, or let him have it? That horrid thing with the awfully unbecoming hat. I wouldn't for anything!"

"Well, why didn't you watch him, and have your wits about you? I didn't give him leave to take it, and he didn't ask; but it's gone."

So it was—clearly—and there was no help for it. "Well, never mind," said Lavinia. "You come and sit down here. I want to tell you such a secret—if you promise faithfully not to breathe a word about it to living mortal."

"Goodness me! But, of course, I will promise. I have such curiosity. I wonder what it can be all about?" And she put on an amused look of blank ignorance.

"Now, don't pretend to be *too* innocent, or I'll not take you into my confidence."

So aunt Polly immediately looked knowing; and they sat down together on the sofa, where we shall leave them exchanging confidences, the purport of which we may safely be allowed to guess without much danger of going too far afield.

CHAPTER III.

A DEPUTATION.

> "Quot homines tot sententiæ."
> —TERENCE.

> "But how, my lord, shall we resist it now?
> It must be thought on."
> —SHAKESPEARE.

THE Bishop received the deputation standing. Personally, there is more dignity in the erect position; and towards your visitors there is seemingly more respect. Added to this, there was that courtly graciousness of manner, which was his lordship's strong point when he liked to assert it—as he did on this important occasion.

"Gentlemen," he said, after the preliminary hand-shaking all round, which was inclusive and impartial—lending point to,

but not offensively, or unduly marking distinctions of social position,—"gentlemen, pray be seated."

He set the example; and leaning back in his chair while the unavoidable confusion of adjustment was subsiding, he played effectively with a large paper-knife till the hush of expectation came, after the movement and the bustle.

"We meet," he went on, "upon a most momentous occasion — an occasion which means to me a new experience and an added responsibility. I will not evade it, because, to be open and frank with you, I feel that to evade it would be to neglect a manifestly plain, an obvious duty, however unequal to the task I may be."

"My lord," said the major-general, starting up, "I feel, and each one of us here to-day feels that, in placing you at the head of this movement, we have done the right thing."

There was a general cry of *Hear! hear!* which said as plainly as it could well be said, that the meeting would not suffer even his lordship to depreciate himself. He took the hint with a bland and gratified smile, and the warrior resumed his seat, with the air of a man who had done, neatly and effectively, what the circumstances demanded—no more and no less.

"Our worthy and rightly esteemed friend," went on the Bishop, "who has just paid me so flattering a compliment, has been good enough to clear the ground for us by forwarding to me a very plain and succinct statement of the object you have in view in seeking my co-operation. I do not conceal from myself the fact that I see before me a most influential, a most representative gathering of citizens. This is satisfactory, gentlemen. We should approach the subject in a very earnest and a very prayerful spirit."

Here he paused for due effect; and the

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company assumed, with various degrees of success, a reverential aspect. One man looked up, another looked down; one shut his eyes, another opened his; one changed his right leg over his left, another put his left over his right; one man pushed his hands into his pockets, another drew his out. The major-general knit his bushy brows. Everybody did something, the reverse of what he had been doing; and the net result seemed to be a cumulative and more concentrated interest. The Bishop piled it on.

"We are in the hands of Gawd, gentlemen. We should not for a moment lose sight of that solemn and awful truth. We are entirely and absolutely in the hands of Gawd. And that being so, gentlemen—that, I say, being so, it is a source of great consolation to me—as it must also be to you—to feel that, in His hands, we are safe. He will guide us, gentlemen, rest assured, to a right conclusion."

Of course the Bishop knew. He delivered the words with outstretched palm. He was clearly on terms of intimacy with Divine Providence by right of office, and spoke authoritatively on what he understood to be a fact. Major-General Bynge-Hudson, who did not think it opportune to quarrel with the sentiment, did not question the authority which Dr Quodlibet had for uttering it, and so it passed muster as a truism with the others.

"And now, gentlemen, I am entirely and absolutely at your service. Be so good, therefore, as to be perfectly open and candid with me, stating, without reserve, what your views and wishes are, and how, in your opinion, I can best be of service." Here his eyes took in, in one comprehensive sweep of vision, the visitors collectively, and then rested momentarily upon Canon Fungus.

That dignitary rose. He did not relish having to play second fiddle to old Bynge-

Hudson; but even this was better than not to assert himself at all as an instrument in that social orchestra.

"As our spiritual head, my lord," said the Canon, "you will excuse me if I say that we look to you for guidance, for light and leading—if I may say so. It would be presumption to do more. I put it to the members of this deputation, which you have so kindly received here to-day, whether it would not savour of dictation on our part to suggest any hard-and-fast line of action."

"Quite so! Hear! hear!" ejaculated Ridgeway, a small tradesman with a very big opinion of himself. This evoked a consensus of opinion evinced by a responsive *Hear! hear!* but with a sharp superadded *hem!* from the major-general for his own private self-support and mental protest. As a Plym, he objected to the "spiritual head" assertion, but he let it pass without further remark for the sake of harmony.

"I fully recognise my responsibility," said the Bishop; "and I appreciate the confidence which you so kindly repose in me; but I cannot conceal from myself the knowledge that the subject is one foreign to my functions and to my experience, for I cannot say that I have ever even been on a race-course."

"That don't make no matter, my lord," said Mr Dewar, another tradesman, speaking up and encouraged by the success of Ridgeway—"not a pin's worth, so it don't." Dewar was a strict Methodist, now for the moment intoxicated, or let us say exhilarated, by the good company he was in. To his mind the case was one logically on all-fours with the question of the suppression of the stage. He had never been to a theatre, but his son had, and as a consequence—Dewar argued—went long ago to perdition.

"We'll back you up, my lord, every man

on us — from the General down to your humble servant."

"Quite so!" again interpolated Ridgeway, leading off the applause with another "Hear! hear!"

With such patting on the back, even a bishop will get over his modesty and nervousness. So after a little more skirmishing and by-play the real work began, and the meeting settled down to business—which we need not fully report. I merely cull such preliminary portions as I think likely to be interesting or characteristic.

"The issue cannot be doubtful, my friends, since—as I said—we are in the hands of Gawd; but, nevertheless, the path is strewn with many and great difficulties. There are various forms of madness, but this—this—hippomania (if I may coin a word) has always appeared to me to be the most unaccountable and extraordinary. The word is one which perhaps a fastidious classical

scholar might take objection to and repudiate as a vile compound"—and he smiled towards his chaplain; but this apologetically and indeed quite parenthetically.

"Oh! not at all, my lord," stammered the Rev. Septimus Stole, "really I assure you." He was flattered and confused at the same time.

Canon Fungus saw his opportunity, and jealously seized it. "Your lordship forgets that your private chaplain rides a bicycle, and does not object therefore to a word similarly compounded. He may safely pardon his diocesan."

The Bishop smiled, so did Stole, as the best way out of it, so did a few others; and then so did all the remainder from force of example.

"Strange and incredible as at first it may appear to you, gentlemen," his lordship went on, "it is nevertheless an undoubted fact, as my clerical brethren will tell you, that the early Fathers actually countenanced horse-

racing—if they did not even do more than countenance it."

"The early mothers could not have been up to much in them times, my lord," put in Dewar again, "or there would have been a different story to tell about that. The women is mostly to blame."

"Quite so! Hear! hear!" as before from Ridgeway. There was a suppressed titter now among the minority, but the Bishop kept his countenance this time—thus deprecating the merriment. He wished to convey to his clergy that such lay ignorance was far too serious a matter to be laughed at in the first place; and in the second place, that the Fathers were no fit subject for a joke, under any circumstances. It was unseemly—to say the least of it—for Stole or Fungus to laugh. The Rev. Joseph Tinkler, who was devoid of all sense of humour, scored off his brother clerics this once—a thing which he seldom did.

"I find confirmation of it here," went on the Bishop, opening a large book in front of him, and putting his first finger on a particular passage. "It is stated by St Jerome, in his life of St Hilarian, that the latter consecrated a bowl of water for the sporting Christian Italicus, by the sprinkling of which upon his horse he was enabled to beat the horse of a pagan."

"The act of a black-leg and a swindler, my lord," said an honest enthusiast in the background; "he deserved to be lynched, saint or no saint."

"Quite so! Hear! hear!" again promptly uttered by Ridgeway. The sentiment met with general approval and consequent applause. The Bishop held up his hand deprecatingly.

"Do not let us be too excited, gentlemen. It is not well to import undue heat into a friendly discussion." This was spoken in an all-round sort of way, but was pointed at

Ridgeway as the chief fomenter of this objectionable enthusiasm. "I was about — when I was interrupted — to observe that this curious fact may have been the beginning of that want of moral rectitude which has always been associated with horse-racing to the present day — so that the best animal seldom or never wins."

"That's so, my lord; seldom or never's the word," said Joe Arrowsmith, pastrycook and lay-preacher, who in his green youth had once, in a moment of weakness, which he had never forgotten, ventured a sovereign on "a sweep," and lost it. "They get 'pulled' by a jockey, and you are never sure of fair play. Some outsider, that you hadn't a shilling on, comes in first, and— there you are!"

He spoke so fast that there wasn't a chance of stopping him. The loss of his coin had given him an enduring interest in horse-racing. Thus does the past tread ever

on the heels of time, and give to memory its perennial youth.

"Yet," continued the Bishop, passing by the interruption, "how strangely and mysteriously Providence works! St Jerome goes on to record that the result of this particular race was the means of making, under Gawd, many converts to Christianity. Out of evil—good! But it is because I feel that the modern race-course can have no such satisfactory result, but one directly the opposite, that I do not hesitate to aid in the suppression of this projected scheme, and to do all that in me lies to stamp out the plague before it spreads. I shall ask all my clergy to give me their prayerful support, and to help me in the good work. The youth of their several parishes should be warned in time, and be put upon their guard. To effect these objects I intend, with the assistance of my private chaplain, to issue, at once, a circular note asking for

an early sermon on the pitfalls and snares of horse-racing—to be preached in the several churches in my diocese."

Joe Arrowsmith resumed. "It ain't so much pitfalls and snares, nor yet hurdles, fences, nor ditches. There is more to get over in this business than outsiders supposes, my lord; or insiders, for the matter of that." The words were mysterious, to say the least of it.

"I shall be glad of any information, I need hardly say," said the Bishop, tentatively. "Perhaps you would be good enough, sir, to explain." There was just a shade of annoyance in his tone.

Ridgeway came to his lordship's support with another *Hear! hear!* He thought it only right to back up authority.

Joe Arrowsmith met the difficulty by asking a question. "How about the Rev. John Chedder, my lord?" He paused for a reply, and then curtly remarked, "I

doubt you'll have a hard nut to crack in that quarter."

The phrase was vague and vulgar; but, somehow, there seemed to be a sensation of latent and sudden thunder in the air.

"I do not yet quite catch your meaning, sir," said the Bishop. And he looked from Joe to Ridgeway, then at Stole, and from him to Canon Fungus—his eyes opening wider as they moved. Could it be possible that there was a traitor among his lieutenants? Chedder had only lately been ordained and admitted to his diocese. The pause was awkward. At last the Canon broke it.

"I think it only right to tell you, my lord, now that it has been thus openly referred to, that there is a report to the effect that the Rev. John Chedder is not only a subscriber to the race fund, but intends to run a horse. It is not mere idle rumour either, because Mr Chedder talks

freely—so, at least, I understand—to everybody on the subject—and—and—in fact—backs his own horse."

"Ay! and backs his own horse honestly, like a man," said a small, round-faced, featureless fellow, with no hair about him except a beard on his poll, who suddenly emerged from the back row and—slapping his thigh—showed front to the Canon. This was Mr Simon Flood, tobacconist, who, if the truth must be owned, was there not entirely of his own free will, but by order of his wife, and was therefore all the more disposed to be irate. "And what's more, he's not likely to go into a corner to do anything he does. I say that from what I know of the gentleman. He and I don't agree in politics or religion, perhaps, but neither of us likes backbiting our neighbours; and I think Canon Fungus, my lord, ought to leave names unmentioned."

"I was not the first to introduce them," the Canon explained.

But Flood had it in for Fungus, and would not be put down.

"I think it a sight less objectionable, my lord," he thundered out, "to have an odd young parson here and there who goes in for races and other things, than a lot of older ones who go in for keeping shops and for trading—getting up co-operative stores and the like, and injuring small struggling tradesmen in their legitimate business, and poaching on their preserves." He brought down his right fist into his left palm with a bang, and with a look at Canon Fungus, which spoke not only volumes but daggers.

There were wheels within wheels. The Rev. John Chedder smoked, and got all his tobacco from Flood. Moreover, the Rev. John Chedder had in his parish a brother-in-law of Flood, a saddler and harness-maker, who had lately got a big order from

the young parson. Circumstances which therefore were too strong for him drove Flood, as we said, to join the deputation; but his feelings as a man and a brother-in-law went solid for Chedder, and they would have done so even without the uncalled-for interference of the Canon with legitimate trade, through the co-operative stores.

"I think it mean and shabby, my lord; I may as well speak plain!"

The moment was a trying one for orthodoxy and the Church. In the presence of his Bishop it was incumbent on the Canon to rise to the occasion, and he endeavoured to do so.

"Well," he said, with a bland smile, "I may, I suppose, Mr Flood, take it that the reference to co-operative stores is intended for me."

"If the cap fits," said Flood.

"Quite so!" put in the irrepressible Ridgeway, rubbing his hands; "Hear! hear!"

He much enjoyed it. He thought the whole thing as good as a play. It was long, very long, since he had been to a theatre. It was possibly over forty years since he had so sinned and been converted; but the dramatic instinct asserted itself, and he was momentarily happy.

"Oh yes, it fits exactly," said the Canon; "that's why I put it on. But you all seem to forget, as far as that goes, that some of the shopkeepers and others, who should know better, poach on my preserves and go in for a great deal of lay-preaching. It is only diamond cut diamond after all."

He was hitting hard below the belt, and the Bishop looked embarrassed. He was afraid old Bynge-Hudson might cut up rough. He shook his head at the Canon. This was treading on too dangerous ground, for the major-general was a man not only of strong convictions, but with the courage of those convictions. A prompt application

of the oiled feather was necessary and urgent.

"My friends," the Bishop said, "let us for the present, in the face of the grave difficulties we have to contend with, lay aside our individual differences of opinion. I am anxious of all things that we should work together as one man, and present a bold unbroken front to the common enemy. Only by unanimity can we hope to succeed. I appeal with confidence to the good feeling and good sense of both the Canon and Mr Ridgeway, as well as to all our friends here to-day; and I feel confident that I do not appeal in vain. It has been truly said that recrimination is a most powerful weapon—a most dangerous weapon—in controversy; but noble minds are disinclined to use it."

"With regard to that, my lord," persisted Flood, still inclined to be aggressive and disputatious, "I make bold to say——"

"Oh! stuff and nonsense!" said the major-general, waxing wroth at such presumption, and deprecating the bumptiousness of such small fry; "let us get to business."

"Quite so! Hear! hear!" from Ridgeway again, growing jealous of Flood's pertinacity, and anxious, of all things, to be on the winning side. Under the circumstances, the Bishop thought he was safe in ignoring Flood, and he did so with a lofty disregard.

"It has always been a source of wonder to me," he said, resuming the judicial air, "that rational human beings—for I must presume these people to be rational—should take such an interest in this demoralising pursuit. Wiser men than I have been equally puzzled. Even philosophy, in the dark ages, has grappled with the difficulty without finding a satisfactory solution. Pliny the Younger says, if I mistake not, in a letter to Calvisius, that it is astonishing how so many thousands of sane human

beings should be filled with the childish desire to see a number of horses gallop. But we have to deal with the humiliating fact as we find it; and the initial difficulty meets us at the outset, that we have to contend with the Legislature instead of obtaining its support. You are aware, gentlemen, of the fact that both Houses of Parliament are not ashamed to adjourn the business of the nation in order that their individual members may attend horse-races. This is a humiliating admission, no doubt, but it is strictly true. What is to be done, then, by us, in this comparatively insignificant corner of her Majesty's dominions, by our vigorous and united action? It remains to be seen. Of course our first step must be to call a public meeting immediately."

"There is no time to be lost," said a mild man in the rear.

"None — none whatever," assented the Bishop. "No time should be lost in this

—or in any other matter. The value of time cannot be overestimated. Through the ages and by all creeds this great truth has been accepted and acknowledged. My friend does well to remind us of it." This was a figure of speech as to friendship on the part of his lordship, as the man was unknown to him; but he felt grateful to the speaker for giving him an opportunity of introducing a bit of regulation padding of the orthodox kind. "We must endeavour at once to enlist the sympathy of the fourth estate. The columns of that sterling print, the 'Westerly Standard,' are still open to us. The editor, whom I expected to see here to-day, will doubtless——"

"Nobbled! my lord," suddenly ejaculated Simon Flood, rubbing his hands.

"Nobbled!" repeated his lordship, with a bewildered and questioning air.

"Yes, nobbled! last night. No doubt about it."

The Bishop looked around for an explanation. There was an awkward pause. At last the major-general stepped into the breach. "He means, I presume, that Mr Summers has been got at by this Hinch—been bribed, in fact. Is that it, Mr Flood?"

"Yes, General. You've hit it. He has a leading article turning his coat to-day; and one side of his paper is entirely taken up with Hinch's advertisements. So it is all U P in that quarter."

There was a general sense of depression consequent on this explanation.

"I am surprised and pained beyond measure," said the Bishop. And so he had a right to be, for Summers had always been a pronounced Churchman, who executed the cathedral printing, sold religious books, and all that sort of thing. It was humiliating, to say the least of it. "We must, if needs be, start a paper of our own. I see nothing else for it. In all these cases the first

consideration is a pecuniary one. I am therefore prepared to head a subscription list with a donation of fifty pounds. We must be up and doing."

After the applause had subsided, the major-general announced that he would emulate the good example. More applause and more subscriptions followed; and finally a goodly sum was collected in the room, to be supplemented by an appeal to the outside public, the net result to be expended as his lordship should think best. Mr Pipperly, of course, consented to act as banker. And thus the opposition seemed fairly started.

As the deputation retired, it was intimated to the Rev. Joseph Tinkler by the chaplain that his lordship wished to see him privately in his study—a mandate which was duly obeyed, but with a nervousness which showed how infrequent such an honour was. Did it bode good or evil? Probably we shall know in due time. While the interview is

in progress we may as well take the opportunity of telling all that need be told as to the result of this important meeting, and the subsequent steps taken by its members to defeat the common enemy.

Every one felt that Hinch was hard to beat, as in truth he was. He had the "whip hand" and a good "back" from a social and pecuniary point of view. In a few days the excitement became intense. It rose to boiling-heat on both sides. Public meetings were held, and the battle raged furiously. Hinch had any amount of "go." The dates of the two days' "events" were posted in large letters all over the town, and were actually stuck up on the major-general's gate-piers by some unregenerate bill-sticker. It was even said that a like outrage had been perpetrated at the entrance to the episcopal palace; but if so, the man at the gate-lodge was up early enough to remove the obnoxious

placards before they caught the Bishop's eye. A large majority of the tradesmen of Westerly, from, it is reasonably to be presumed, the most sordidly interested motives, went over to the enemy; and the Rev. John Chedder created a huge scandal by openly and defiantly doing the same. The result was disastrous to the religious party in the contest, and the races were, it must be admitted, a complete success.

How many of the youth went astray, in consequence, it is quite impossible to say; but it is an undoubted fact that the Canon's son, Joel, made a good thing out of it all, and puzzled his sisters by telling them of the apparently magical feat of "putting a pony on a horse," and "netting a clean hundred" thereby—as he explained in a moment of confidence.

Putting a pony on a horse, and getting it to stay there, seemed to them such an extraordinary thing that they agreed not

"to split," if he enlightened them as he promised to do. Pending explanations, he generously presented each with a "fiver." All this might be sufficient to show the demoralising tendency of the sport which the Bishop had set his clergy to denounce without effect; but if we take this case of young Fungus as a typical one, we are bound to follow it up—which we have not time to do—in order to arrive at a correct estimate of the immoral results of horse-racing. Suffice it to say that Joel had taken his first step on the downward path, and realised the dangerous truth, as expressed by the poet—

"Lucri bonus est odor ex re qualibet."

But he is an utterly uninteresting personage at the best. I introduce him here merely to point a moral, and dismiss him for the present without apology. I have a superstitious theory. I may be wrong; but it

appears to me that if you socially handicap your first-born with such a name as Joel, you can't expect much good out of him in the race of life. Of course young fellows will go to the dogs, quite irrespective of the accidents of baptism; but, all the same, I hold to my belief.

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER AN UMBRELLA.

"Quam sæpe forte temere
Eveniunt quæ non audeas optare?"
—Terence.

When the Rev. Joseph Tinkler left the palace after a brief interview with his Bishop, and turned his footsteps towards the town, it might have been supposed, judging by his gait and aspect, that he had been sent for only to be admonished, and had been dismissed with a caution.

He looked depressed, and there was no lightness in his walk. Yet many of his brethren would have carried the head proudly enough, and stepped out very briskly indeed, under the circumstances!

He had, in fact, been offered the desirable

preferment of the living of Scottowe, with its historic old church and delightful rectory.

Will it be believed by ordinary common-sense folk, such as you and I, that he actually — while profoundly grateful to, and warmly thanking the Bishop — hesitated about it; and asked for some time—"say till to-morrow evening"—to make up his mind? Think of the difference between a poor hard-worked curate and a comfortably beneficed clergyman, my dear sir, and picture to yourself any sane man being such an idiot! But he had scruples, you see—does that make him less of an idiot?

The Bishop respected and admired these scruples—so he told Tinkler. Does that make him any more of a bishop? Well, no; but he knew from experience that such scruples were generally fictitious, and that in the one or two rare cases (and this was one) where they are genuine, they are always overcome by force of circumstances or by

pressure of friends; so he shook hands, and agreed to wait.

Tinkler was going back now to his quiet lodgings, in order to go through a severe course of introspection, to question and wrestle with himself, and then to pray secretly and silently for guidance. He did not know whether his intellectual gifts, his attainments, or his temperament, justified him; or whether his constitution was equal to the strain which he imagined would be put upon it by increase of responsibility. He was so profoundly humble-minded that to have thus, for the first time, in his own power the option of bettering his worldly condition, frightened him. He felt sorry, too, at the thought of leaving all his parishioners, who were old friends, and seeking fresh ones among new parishioners. But these same old friends would, as the Bishop very well knew, be the strongest persuaders to contend against when asked for their advice;

so he was content to wait for Tinkler's answer, which was a foregone conclusion long before the question was put. The news would be all over the town, and public opinion would side with Tinkler's friends, so that he would be powerless to stem the tide. As a matter of fact, Stole had been directed to convey to the press "authority for stating that the Lord Bishop had offered to the worthy and esteemed curate of Westerly the important and valuable living of Scottowe, vacant by the death of the late incumbent."

He looked now as if the weight of empire, with all its cares, risks, and responsibilities, had come suddenly upon him. It was a good long step into the town from the palace. Just as he reached the top of the High Street, the rain, which had been threatening for some time, came down suddenly and heavily, which enforced speedy recognition and necessary precaution.

Tinkler stopped to put up his umbrella. He found himself facing a shop entrance, in the porch of which—taking shelter from the downpour—was Georgie, with her garments neatly gathered up, and her small feet encased in the daintiest of boots, looking all round the pink of perfection and neatness.

She greeted him—an old friend—with a pleasant smile, and a movement as though she would venture out to shake hands with him. He could not allow this, of course, so he made for the porch out of politeness; and doubtless for the same reason she made room for him. He closed the umbrella, and held the point of it outside to drip, with his left arm in the wet, while he shook hands. She had heard the news of his advancement only a few moments before from Stole, but as he asked her not to mention it till next day, she said nothing; but the fact gave her a very much greater interest in Tinkler than she ever felt before. Don't

jump at false conclusions and blame her. She could no more help it than you or I. We all like success; we tolerate mediocrity, and we despise failure. Success is always interesting. Even the evil-doings of a great criminal command our careful attention; and we can't avoid sometimes an unexpressed wish that he may escape punishment. Are we therefore to be called base? And why should you set her down at once as having a sordid and ulterior object in view because she showed this sudden interest in the advancement of a worthy man? The fact is, you know too much about her.

They talked and chattered for a considerable time about everyday matters and local topics, while the rain came down, and the cabs emerged from the back streets and lane stables (making their appearance like huge slugs out of dank quarters) in the wet, and picking up stray old ladies anxious to

get home without damage. At last the storm cleared off a bit; and a sudden glint of sunshine made both crane out and look —one up and the other down the street. There was nothing in their looking opposite ways; and it was not to see if any one was approaching who might make mischief, for there was none to be made; but you cannot be a very observant person if you have not noted the same peculiarity in any two persons under similar circumstances.

They ventured out together at last.

"You must not let me take you out of your way," she said.

"No," he replied, "you do not. I am going your way,—in fact, I was just making for home."

"Oh, how fortunate! I'm so glad!"

Home he called it! Look you—a mere lodging; just a bedroom and sitting-room, and—all by himself. No wonder Georgie had pity for him. She was so glad he was

on the road to promotion. I say once more she could not help it.

The deluging shower began again. The umbrella had therefore to go up; and, as a matter of common politeness, he had to offer his arm. As a matter of common precaution she had to take it, and keep close up to him too, to prevent the drops from wetting her shoulders. Shop-boys and shop-girls sniggered and looked out of windows; but when they saw that the man was Tinkler they didn't trouble to put two and two together, because they knew that the same umbrella had been held by the same kindly hand over the poorly clad and the humble times out of number. Georgie did not care whether they sniggered or not; and he, good soul, didn't notice anything.

Old Mrs Mannix, the dressmaker, ventured a hazardous bet as they passed her door. "I'll lay my life," said she to a customer, "that the doctor's daughter is coming to her

senses. Time is nearly up with the officers. She'll have to take what she can get or do without."

"She'd be a fortunate woman if she got him," said the customer.

"Oh! maybe so," responded Mrs Mannix; "that's neither here nor there!"

"He's one of the best creatures in the world."

"I find them sort gets their wives to become milliners—for dressing niggers mostly," retorted Mrs Mannix, "Dorkissis and the like. Passons is mostly aither fools or humbugs; and they all has the same sort of conversation, which makes it sometimes puzzling to separate 'em." She meant classify. "It's by the wives I find it out. The humbugs marry rich ones; and the pauper ladies, after they have had their fling, and can't find nothing better, goes in for the fools."

"But there is a large section left out of

this calculation, Mrs Mannix; the ladies who have had their fling, but aren't paupers."

"You mean like her?"

"Yes."

"They mostly run to old maids if they don't meet with stray fools too: they're all as one; for husbands they *must* get. They ain't all clever enough for lawyers, Mrs Jenkins."

Mr Jenkins was an attorney, who had been one too many for Mrs Mannix in a case of disputed accounts against a client, which she hadn't forgotten. But we digress.

"Do you know, Mr Tinkler," said Georgie, stopping him for a moment at a crossing to gather up her skirts again, "I often fancy you must be doing too much: working too hard, slaving about in all sorts of weather, looking after poor people, and attending meetings. You never get any rest, and don't take any care of yourself."

"Oh, not at all. Why do you think so?"

"Well, papa was saying yesterday that you looked harassed and overworked. He said he wanted you to come to dinner, and you were off on duty, and wouldn't listen to him. You ought to go to the seaside, or somewhere for rest, like other people."

"I don't feel as if I wanted rest, I assure you; but—I—I—confess to you that, just at present, I am rather anxious about a certain matter—about what course to pursue under sudden and peculiar circumstances which have cropped up—very unexpectedly. I shall probably consult him to-day, or perhaps to-morrow."

"Oh, do! I hope you have not had any unpleasant news." Here there was just a very gentle pressure on his arm.

"It is nothing — unpleasant, but — momentous."

She looked up at him with those expressive eyes of hers, and with a questioning gaze which he could not resist. He wanted

sympathy and friendly advice—here was the first indication of the existence of the former. The gentle pressure on his arm was not relaxed; and Georgie certainly looked her best. He was a man, and not a mere brother. The moment was opportune.

"I have not told anybody yet," he said; "but I will venture to tell you." It never occurred to him that it was not, up to that time, possible to have told any one else, Georgie being the first acquaintance he had met since he left the palace.

"Is it a secret?" she asked.

"Well, it is and it isn't, really. But——"

"Oh! I'll keep it—for ever; you may rely on me."

"I am sure of that—absolutely certain. I merely mean that I do not wish it talked about—till to-morrow evening."

"Ah!" said Georgie, "I can respect your confidence for a longer time than that, I hope, without any very great effort. But

can I be of any use to you? That is what I should like."

"You are very kind and good."

"Oh no; I try to be kind, of course, but I'm not good," said Georgie, deprecatingly, as became a young woman acknowledging her shortcomings to her spiritual head. "We are none of us good. Don't say that any more," and she shook her head at him most sternly. "You are such a generous kind man yourself, that you judge other people by your own standard."

The fine perception which could detect any tinge of insincerity in Georgie was wanting; and the utter absence of all guile led him to believe fully in her honesty of speech. Was he not justified in this? Had not the Bishop said quite as much, or more, a short hour previously? There was no collusion, and each was personally disinterested as a witness in his favour. But now, as then, he felt abashed, as a modest man will who

has throughout his life been unaccustomed to praise, and has done his best without it.

"I am very pleased, of course," he said, "to find that you think so well of me—so kindly; but really I don't deserve it."

"If you did not you would soon be told so, I promise you, by other people," said Georgie.

He looked full into her face. There was a charmingly open expression in it. "You must not flatter me any more," he urged.

"I don't flatter one bit—I never do—I hate it. When I say you are all these things, I only repeat what everybody says."

He shook his head deprecatingly; but still it was soothing to hear all this, after having duly protested against it.

"Oh, it is no use denying it," she persisted. "Papa says you'll break yourself down if you don't take advice in time. Mamma told him he ought to speak to you, and he said it was no use, so I determined to do so myself on the first opportunity."

"What if I were to take the advice—coming from you?"

"Oh, I so wish you would! I'm sure you would acknowledge that my prescription was sound. You overdo things."

"We cannot overdo our duty."

"That's all very well; but, if you kill yourself, you can't do any duty then."

No: but in that case should he not have his reward? Should he? That was the question. Had he any wish to die? Well, honestly, no—to-day less than ever. As he met her upturned gaze once more, his memory reverted to a time when he had dared to hope that his reward might begin in this world, and that Georgie might be its chief ingredient. The soldiers scared him off on that occasion; but now! A strange sensation thrilled through him as of latent possibilities and unexpected developments — confusing, complicated, but somehow, in the aggregate consoling.

"You promised to tell me something—a secret. Now I'm quite ready."

"Well, I am troubled and perplexed about an offer made to me to-day, by the Bishop. He has given me preferment—in fact, the option of accepting the rectory of Scottowe."

"Oh, I *am* so glad!" She stopped suddenly, to emphasise her joy. It would have taken a cleverer man than Tinkler to discover that the news had not burst upon her then for the first time.

"At the prospect of getting rid of me?" he said in a tentative way. He felt there would be pleasure in hearing her repudiation of the idea, and knew that she would repudiate it. He was fast becoming demoralised.

"Oh no: you know very well it isn't that. The dear Bishop! It shows that he can see for himself, at all events, and reward the men that really do the work."

"But I have not accepted, as yet. It is

not certain that I shall. There are a great many——"

"What!" she exclaimed, speaking slowly and deliberately. "You don't really and truly mean to tell me that you were so—so —disinterested" (she was within an ace of saying stupid) "as to throw away such a —chance"—the last word escaped her, and there was no help for it,—"the chance—of doing so much good, and of extended usefulness." She did not get out of it so badly after all.

"I have asked for time—till to-morrow—to consider the proposal, and to talk it over with my most intimate friends; and you are the first to whom I have unburdened myself."

"I'll soon settle it, if you leave it to me," said Georgie. "Now, just you promise me faithfully that you'll come and see papa and talk to him before you come to any fixed determination."

"Very will; I will promise."

She had got to the same conviction as the Bishop about the final result; though, like him, she thought it just as well to let the fish play with the bait, which he was sure to swallow. After all, this is the only way—if you come to look at it—in which a fish can be hooked. You angle for him; but he immolates himself. You can stand on the bank and gaff him, and do the landing by-and-by on your own account—and this was what she meant to do. Tinkler's fate was sealed; though he posed, to his own satisfaction, as a free agent. The Bishop thought him a good catch—as a worthy clergyman deserving promotion; she thought him an equally good catch—from an entirely different point of view.

They chatted on pleasantly enough till they reached her door-steps, and the time came for parting. He felt as though he should awfully like just to kiss her hand as

she laid it in his, but he restrained himself of course. It was so nice to be liked by anything pretty; so gratifying to be appreciated by Georgie—and a Bishop—on the same day. No wonder if he lingered while he said farewell, and repeated it.

"I hope you'll feel really sorry when you leave us, at all events," said she.

"If I leave you I most undoubtedly shall; but we will let the question lie over and remain in doubt till to-morrow."

He did not lay stress on the *you* in any way, but it was unnecessary. He shook hands a second time, however, and lifting his hat (carefully sheltered under the umbrella), went his way.

She knocked and rang with her usual vigour, which always had the effect of making her nervous mother jump up in her chair. Then she stole a glance at the retreating figure down the street.

"Ah, well," she said, in a comforting sort

of way to herself, "what matters? He is what people call a good soul." Here she scraped one dainty boot and then the other, meditatively. "Yes; I know it really means that a person has either a bad figure, or a bad constitution, or is ill of the epidemic called poverty, each of which is supposed to be counterbalanced by—'a good soul.' In his case it is the figure only; and it isn't every girl that can pick and choose. He can be managed, and made perfectly happy and contented; and he is as honest as the day. I could, if I were ever wicked enough, easily deceive him; but he would never think of trying to deceive me or anybody else—the good soul! Only imagine his living such a lonely life for so long, in those depressing lodgings—all by himself! He can't be permitted to do the same in the big house at Scottowe. Somebody must marry him; and, if I do, I'll not let him fret or get sorry."

And Georgie went indoors a more serious

girl than she was when she went out half an hour before, and heard the interesting bit of news from the Rev. Septimus Stole.

Stole himself was sorry—very sorry. He told every one that he should miss Tinkler very much indeed, which was literally true; but the interpretation put upon this regret by the public was not the right one; all the same, it answered Stole's purpose. His feeling was selfish; he found Tinkler so useful and obliging. Only recently—to mention an instance which has occurred to me—at the school children's picnic, all the penny buns would have been devoured by the hungry young marauders before the prescribed time, were it not that this kindly curate sat upon the hamper to keep the lid down. Would his successor sit upon the hamper, or allow himself to be sat upon by Stole?

Perhaps, when Georgie comes to explain herself more fully by-and-by, my common-

sense readers may discover better excuse for her self-interestedness than for Stole's; and will give due weight to the various items of self-sacrifice which she will have to face.

CHAPTER V.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

"Say not the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain!"
—Clough.

"Carpitque et carpitur una,
Suppliciumque suum est."
—Ovid.

At breakfast Mrs Collyrium hardly ever appeared at her best. It is a meal, it must be confessed, not favourably adapted to show off to the least disadvantage the social defects of a hypochondriac, for, like the queen of the Grotto of Grief in the 'Spectator,' she was "full of herself, always in eternal pensiveness." She and Georgie were not in good humour on this particular morning. There was, therefore, a good deal of conversational skirmishing, which finally resulted

in a downright passage of arms. It would be hardly fair to report the whole of it, and possibly might not be interesting. We will therefore use our discretion in the matter.

"Well, mamma," said Georgie, "what *is* the earthly use of always grumbling? Why don't you refuse all invitations, stop at home, and go to bed, if you don't feel equal to going out?"

"It is no pleasure to me, all the same. I assure you I merely do it, and have done it, out of a sense of duty to you. You manifestly derive a certain amount of pleasure from it, though it does knock me up for a week."

Georgie said "Pish!" in a very rude and contemptuous way, which quite sufficed to silence her mother for the time being; the pause being devoted to the despatch of business.

"Well," resumed Georgie, putting down

her empty cup into the saucer, with a clang which almost startled her mother into letting her full one fall out of her nervous grasp; "I won't ask you to sacrifice yourself any more on the altar of affection. I'm quite sick and tired of it all."

"It certainly is time for you to look at life a little more seriously."

"That's just it. I've come to the conclusion that I must, positively and truly, do something. I was seriously thinking, some time ago, of advertising for a situation as a governess—headed TALENTS TO LET—don't you know; just like 'Apartments to Let,' or 'Furnished Lodgings to Let.' You know the sort of thing; it would look first-rate in large print."

"Even if you meant what you say, you could not hold such a post," said her mother, with a blandly aggravating sceptical smile; and helping herself to the discarded stale slice of bread (cut off by Georgie) as a silent

protest against wasteful habits. "You are so very impulsive."

"Very impulsive! You mean bad-tempered, of course. Well, I'm not! I'm much obliged all the same. I thought you meant that I was too stupid. In any case I didn't mean what I said, so it does not matter. I have no notion of being a governess. I'd rather be a kitchen-maid. Heigh-ho!" and she sighed a big, loud, deep sigh. "I wish I could invent something for taking away pimples and moles, or removing what are called 'superfluous hairs.' There's Canon Fungus with a big thing on his left cheek, and several bulrushes growing out of it, and old Mrs Fungus with a lot of brushwood about her chin that I'm sure she'd give pounds and pounds to get rid of. Papa says that the patent medicines are all simply humbug, and yet people go crazed about them, and the knowing ones make fortunes."

"It is hardly likely that your father will

leave you in such a position as to render it at all necessary for you to earn your bread. I don't know why you should suppose it possible."

"I don't suppose it, or suppose anything at all. You can't understand the feeling of wishing 'to be, or to do, or to suffer,' like the definition of a verb in Lindley Murray's grammar — something, or anything, for a change, just to get out of one's every-day humdrum life, and to step into something different; to become a rowdy, or a female chimney-sweep, or an actress, or a hospital nurse, or a nun, or anything to effect a radical change, and get up a new sensation."

"One thing is quite clear, at all events, as I have frequently said, your father has a great deal to answer for. He has utterly spoiled you."

"I'm sure he spoils you a great deal more. He is too fond of you to give you physic;

and he tries all his experiments on me instead. You see the result of his last new tonic: I simply devour everything within reach."

Devour! The word was enough in itself, without the association of ideas, to do away with any slight relish Mrs Collyrium might have had for anything on the table. She sighed one of her small but most eloquent sighs, and leaned back in her chair.

There was silence for another space, broken only by the clatter of her daughter's knife and fork.

"Positively, Georgie, it is oppressive," said she, refilling the latter's cup, "quite oppressive to see any one, especially a lady, eat such a breakfast. It makes me feel faint."

"I should be faint if I didn't," replied Georgie, leaning across the table for the marmalade. "It is two days since I took papa's tonic. I can't help it, really."

"Oh, nonsense! you should help it. It is too gross: you give way to it."

"Of course: I eat when I'm hungry, and I stop when I'm — satisfied. Everybody does, I suppose."

"Excuse me, everybody does not: it is brutish, mere animalism."

"Well, I never set up for being anything but an animal, and I don't mean to; but I can't see that being a half-starved and hungry one implies any particular amount of virtue."

"I didn't suggest starvation," said Mrs Collyrium, severely; "but there is, let me tell you, such a thing as moderation in all things. You always contrive somehow to put a wrong construction on what I say; or you give me a short answer if I venture to open my mouth."

"Ah! what's the use of going on so, mamma? You know very well I don't mean it half my time, when I say I do," replied

Georgie, still more intent on her breakfast than argument; "but you are so awfully touchy, you know."

The reader will have surmised that mother and daughter were not sympathetic, but fiercely antagonistic. The mother was generally considered a charming person, and was liked by everybody except Georgie; yet, strange to say, she was the only person whom Georgie really disliked. Hardly a day passed without some sparring between them, which sometimes grew so hot as to call for the interference of the doctor. Mrs Collyrium generally came off second best, because her over-sensitiveness rendered her too open to attack, and she felt a wound where her daughter merely felt a scratch.

All this came to the doctor through an early marriage. He was paying the penalty of his folly by having rivals in his house, where he hoped to find peace.

The most unamiable trait in his daughter's

character was, that she never spared, or made allowance for, her mother's feelings; and the mother, basing her conclusions on the experience which she had of Georgie, applied the abstract to the concrete, and concluded that society in general came in for the same treatment at Georgie's hands, which was far from being the case. There were faults on both sides.

The poor doctor was often bitterly attacked by his wife for not sufficiently upholding her authority, and accused sometimes by the daughter of being prejudiced in favour of the mother, so that he had an anxious time of it; often after a hard day's work, when he would far rather have had peace and quietness. But what man properly so called ever obtains freedom from worry of one sort or another. The doctor was, nevertheless, perfectly just, and both women knew it, though in moments of irritation they mutually tried to fasten a grievance

upon him. He never sided with either except upon conviction, and carefully laboured to explain himself when he did so—which often made more mischief than if he had held his tongue, because it was sure to give a triumph to one or the other, when both were in the wrong.

The state of things at home puzzled him now and then, and he used to wander into mental speculations on atavism and heredity—subjects which still require a great deal of clearing up and systematising; and he had not gone as deeply into them as Prosper-Lucas or Galton.

Georgie wasn't like either parent.

I suppose that the mental and moral qualities of both the male and the female may be neutralised by union, as in chemistry, and the result be quite something else. I don't put it too well, but I think my meaning may be gathered: anyhow, it was somewhat sad for the doctor.

Georgie's sex, too, was a disappointment to all three. If she had been a boy, things would have been very different. There would have been birch-rod and absence from home, instead of perpetual intercourse; and jealousy would have been impossible. She herself would have given worlds to be a boy; and went as near to being one as circumstances would allow. What a dashing soldier she would have made if nature had only been kind, and given her more legitimate fighting to do than a mere war of words, with her mother to represent the enemy! She had striven hard to marry a soldier, with a view no doubt to commanding his regiment ultimately on her own account through him; but failure stared her in the face.

The garrison ball had put her out of heart and spirits, and on this particular morning she was unusually bitter and rebellious. When her mother resumed the attack, she was only too ready for action.

"You know perfectly well, Georgie, the difference between refinement and vulgarity, and how easy it is to be ill-bred. Besides all that, it grows on one so."

"Of course I know; but one must really be a bit ill-natured sometimes, or satirical, or whatever you call it; and one can't help being observant. But one says lots of things, and does lots of things too, that one would not be guilty of for worlds, if one dreamt for a moment that outsiders would know. We fight, mamma, you and I,—there's no mistake about that; but we don't do it in public—that would be truly horrible, and we should never forgive ourselves if we were found out, should we?"

Mrs Collyrium shrugged her shoulders merely, and said nothing.

"I was going to tell you agreeable news a while ago, when we went off the line, and got on to a side track. I may as well do it now. You'll be delighted to hear

that I have wiped out one reproach at all events. You have frequently told me that I never know my own mind. Well, I became more intimate with it quite recently. I've made it up at last—on one point."

Mrs Collyrium waited silently for information, which seemed to slightly nettle Georgie, and drove her into blunt statement of fact.

"I've determined—to get—married."

"Have you a—any——" Mrs Collyrium started in her chair.

"No, I haven't," replied Georgie, taking her mother up short; "but all the same, I've settled who he is to be."

Mrs Collyrium shuddered, and shrank momentarily within herself. "He!"

"You are not surprised, mother, at anything I do—or say: you often tell me so."

"You are so painfully—coarse, child. If you please, let us change the subject."

"Well, if I'm coarse, I'm practical."

Mrs Collyrium shrugged her shoulders again.

"No, mother; please don't let us change the subject—just yet. I'm really serious."

Mrs Collyrium responded to this appeal by a stony but manifestly interested stare, lifting her gaze, but not moving her head. "May I ask," she said, "when you arrived at this determination?"

"Oh! yesterday; quite suddenly."

"Why?"

"Many things led up to it. At the last ball I found myself actually without a partner for three valses—an ominous fact which spoke volumes. One who does not take fair warning deserves and courts disaster. I must not play tricks with time."

"You seem to be very self-satisfied and certain."

"That's just what I'm not, but what I mean to be."

"Well, pretty confident—if you like that

better. Matters are not so easily to be arranged as perhaps you imagine."

"Why?"

"Do you think that you have nothing to do but hold up your hand? Your assurance is amazing! Do you suppose that every girl can succeed in captivating and pleasing a man?"

"No, I don't," said Georgie, complacently; "but if I have succeeded in pleasing so many men, it's queer if I can't please one in particular, now that I have—made up my mind about him."

"You speak as confidently as if the thing were done."

'I do."

"And yet you have not had a proposal."

"No, not yet. You see it is such a very short time since I—made up my mind; but I'll see to it at once now. I'll get him to propose immediately."

"Georgie!"

"Yes. I'm going to bring it about! You think it isn't nice to hear me talk so." She gave her mother time to express her sentiments by another look. "Isn't it? Well, it is not nice either to be left out in the cold, and be laughed at by those who are wrapped up. Romance is all very well till the bloom is off it or off one's self."

"But you can't seriously mean that you are going deliberately to make a dead set at a man, Georgie—to run him down—to—to—deceive him?"

"I never said I would deceive anybody," she went on, with an angry stamp of her foot. "I won't deceive the man. But things have come to such a pass that if I don't—don't—get settled, I'll have to do something desperate or strange. I had it in contemplation recently, to nail up a coat and trousers on the door, as a scarecrow sort of thing, don't you know, warning the men off, just as gamekeepers do stoats and

weasels and magpies, and objectionable vermin generally; but I thought I'd postpone the step for a bit longer. I'm mixing up things rather; but I'm sure you know very well what I mean. I say again, I won't deceive the man; but I don't want to deceive myself. There are objectionable ways of putting things, as you say, and perhaps I am rather too much given to dropping into those ways. I say this out of respect to your more refined nature; but the plain English of the situation is that it looks serious, and I don't want to be—sold, which most likely I shall be if I don't—do something."

Mrs Collyrium became lofty, as in duty bound. "There are certainly objectionable—very objectionable—ways of putting things; and to import slang and sordid self-interest, Georgie, into such a delicate question as this, is really too dreadfully objectionable."

"I don't see why mere sentiment should

suffer in the slightest degree, but rather the contrary, by being made to conform to a sensible matter of business; and, in fact, from what I can see, it very often does; for when people talk of a 'good match'—which I find mothers generally approve of—it is simply business, and nothing more. The gilding is put on the gingerbread, but after all, the gingerbread is the real thing. Now, if I make a prudent match, and marry a good man, I may not unreasonably expect your blessing."

"I hope, with all my heart, that you may be so fortunate as to marry a good man."

"Fortunate! Oh, pooh! I mean to. Didn't I tell you I had made up my mind?"

There was an awkward pause. The mother's curiosity was roused, but she did not like to show it by asking the question which must have been on the tip of her tongue. Georgie did not leave her very long in suspense.

"Shouldn't you really and truly like to

know who the fortunate—victim is to be, mamma?"

"Still jesting, Georgie!" she said, with a severe smile.

"I was never more serious in my life. Don't be surprised when you hear his name —Tinkler!"

But, notwithstanding the caution, her mother was surprised. She raised both her hands momentarily, in an incredulous, jerky, desponding sort of way.

"Goodness!" she ejaculated. "Goodness gracious me!"

"You *are* astonished, after all?"

"Why should I not be? It is not very long since you received the man's advances with a coldness amounting, in my humble opinion, to absolute rudeness—or something next door to it."

"Yes, I admit all that. But things were quite different then. I always had plenty of partners, and he was only a poor curate.

But I have had, as I told you, warnings—serious ones; and he has been appointed by the Bishop to the living of Scottowe. That's what I learned yesterday, when I made up my mind."

Her mother sighed profoundly, and shifted uneasily on her chair.

"You look pained. Why should you feel so?"

"If you had accepted, or even encouraged, him as a curate, I should not have felt so humiliated on your account. I should not have been forced to apply the abominable word *sordid* to the action of my only child." There was a quaver in the voice; Georgie knew her mother too well to be deceived.

"But how could you expect me or ask me to encourage him while he remained a poor curate, mamma? I really could not do it, no matter how hard I might have tried."

"Because he was poor?"

"Yes—I honestly say it—because he was

poor. I always did dislike poor curates to the end of the chapter, even utterly good ones, like Mr Tinkler."

Her mother's cold stare fell on her again, and seemed to ask in a silently pleading sort of way for some explanation that might not show her daughter in such a dreadfully unamiable light. Georgie soon put her out of suspense.

"For it always seems to me," she went on, "such a contemptible thing, mamma, for a man to be secretly pulling the poor devil by the tail all the week-days, and then to spend Sunday in openly abusing him. When a man gets a good living he's under no compliment to the devil then, and may abuse him without being mean, don't you know. It alters the aspect of matters altogether. That's exactly how I feel."

Mrs Collyrium was over-refined for Georgie. The latter's speech, therefore, left her argumentatively stranded. There was only one

mode of escape which she always resorted to under similar circumstances.

"You had better discuss the disagreeable question with your father."

"Why disagreeable? I think it quite pleasant!"

"It is useless my continuing the conversation; but I can't help remarking that it seems rather premature, to say the least of it. You are speculating on an uncertainty."

"Yes; counting chickens prematurely is not sound arithmetic. I never was good at sums; but all the same, mamma, I mean to preside at Scottowe Rectory. I mean to marry Mr Joseph Tinkler; and, when I've got him, I mean to be a good wife, and I mean to astonish you, and some others, by the exemplary manner in which I devote myself ever after to parish work. I'll have a first-rate choir to please him; and I'll look after schools, Dorcas meetings, girls' friendly societies—everything, in fact; and I won't

be taken in by pious old humbugs like Mrs Fungus, and her old husband the canon."

"Mrs Fungus is a genuine, true Christian," observed Mrs Collyrium; "you must be well aware of it."

"Of course I am," responded Georgie; "any misfortune that falls upon her is a trial; when it comes on her neighbours or friends it's a judgment. There is no doubt about her right to the title."

"You have always been uncharitable to her," said Mrs Collyrium, stung into retort, "for no other earthly reason that I could see, except that I have a warm and sincere regard for her."

"Nonsense, mamma! How can any sensible person believe in a creature that pretends to have toothache, when we all know there isn't a tooth in her head—with a root to it. She doesn't get round me with Scripture texts, I can assure you. You know yourself the sort of life she leads the old canon."

"I don't know anything of the sort, and I don't wish you to attribute knowledge to me which is uncharitable and unchristian."

"Well, if you don't know, papa does. I don't intend to lead poor Tinkler a life like that; and I don't intend to humbug people as she does."

I have said that Georgie was coarse, and so has Mrs Collyrium, who hated coarseness, and doubly hated it when it bordered upon profanity. She now gathered up, with offended dignity, the needlework on which she was always engaged, and as she did so, the doctor's latch-key sounded in the lock of the hall-door.

He met his wife at the foot of the stairs, and saw at a glance that there had been a passage of arms.

"Well, my dear?" he said, inquiringly and tentatively.

"Go in," she replied, in a distant and cold tone, which conveyed the often-re-

peated charge that he alone was to blame for Georgie's bringing up, "go in and speak to—your daughter." The voice and the phrase seemed to imply that there was no sense of partnership whatever in this matter of parentage.

"Yes, papa; come in," said Georgie, from the room.

"What's up now, child?" he asked, when they were alone.

"Oh, nothing very much, papa!—and yet there is—a great deal—a very important secret."

He stood with his lips apart—expectant.

"Are you curious to know, eh?"

"Yes, very."

"Really?"

"And truly."

"Well," and she stood on tiptoe and whispered into his ear.

"Stuff! What!—bless my soul!—to whom?"

"Mr Tinkler."

"Humph! That's extraordinary! You might do worse!"

"But—it's because—I can't do better! You dear old man! Now, promise that you will set me up with a good stock of forks and spoons, and all that. Don't be so alarmed! Plated ones will do. They'll look nice and bright and fresh for a while, you know, like the owners; and when the plating is wearing off them the shine will be wearing off us too, in accordance with 'the fitness of things,'—as you say sometimes."

Here Georgie gave him such an affectionate embrace that—looking into her face, and seeing a certain sadness in it, not in accord with the levity of her words—the tears came into his eyes. Before he had time to recover himself she had kissed him again, and was gone. She loved him very much.

"Women are queer cattle," he said to himself, going to his study.

The two he had to deal with gave him a great deal of trouble, it must be owned, from time to time. Why should they be jealous of each other, when he liked both in such an utterly different way? This was the question he often asked himself, and asked himself in vain.

Men, you see, can split hairs, and analyse their feelings, and classify their affections, and codify their emotions: women love or hate. Mrs Collyrium had a set phrase that always drove him wild. "Ah, my dear," she would say with a resigned expression, "it wasn't always so;" meaning that, now, it was all Georgie—while she herself was nothing, and didn't count. "Time was" —but then, that was before Georgie—when her feelings and her opinions and her wishes had "some weight" with the doctor, she was wont to say.

He wondered to himself whether all wives

were alike in this respect. He couldn't tell, of course, without asking the husbands, which was out of the question, so he never ascertained to his own satisfaction whether his wife was singular, or whether she was one of many who expected husbands to go on spooning at fifty, when their heads were bald, as they did at twenty-two; or whether there were mothers, in a majority, sensible enough to recognise the law of change; and to see the selfish littleness of female craving for perpetual worship, when age has necessitated the "scalpette," and brings to light all their inevitable shortcomings and littlenesses, at the same time that it gives them high duties to fulfil, and obligations which cannot be set aside.

Of course there must be change—there always is. But the worst of it all is that the wife calls this change by such dreadful names, that the poor male feels abject and

hurt, and lives on, even to old age, with a feeling that he is guilty of a cumulative kind of baseness which can only terminate with death.

In fairness to the doctor it must be owned that he had loved and worshipped even longer than most husbands do; yet this was not enough. When is it? Women are so voracious in this item of love, that few indeed, and rare, are those husbands who escape reproach.

The plain English of it all is, that the malady is one from which the male recovers, but the female never.

When he wins the "object of his affections" he is satisfied with victory, and prepared to settle down and enjoy the fruits of it; but she must go on repeating victories and accumulating triumphs over him, or she will not rest content. She thinks she retrogrades if she is not fully assured

that she advances, and is loath to recognise the truth, that a time comes when there can be no advance, no more conquering; and, after it, a going down-hill, or even retrogression. She fights against the inexorable law of change; she beats the air, and the stray blows fall retributively on the bald head of the imbecile who so often in years of indiscretion told her that she was an angel, and lives to doubt it.

The doctor often devoutly wished he hadn't said quite so much long ago, or that his wife's memory had not been quite so retentive. At all events, he must see her now about this new revelation of Georgie's. It would be necessary to talk matters over, whether he liked it or not; so, having written a few prescriptions and a letter or two, he left his sanctum and went in search of his wife.

He didn't think much the worse of his daughter. I ask any common-sense father, Why should he? I ask any common-sense woman the same question. Put one such into the judgment-seat of the Court of Conscience, and see whether she will, without grave doubt and hesitation, affix the condemnatory *theta nigrum* to the name of Georgie. I don't think it.

The Rev. Joseph Tinkler was quite unaware of the preparation of this net, in which he would have enmeshed himself long ago if he had had the least encouragement. Georgie had two strings to her bow. She knew his weakness for music, and was confident that her siren voice would penetrate the cotton-wool by which his sensitive tympanum was always protected.

The male biped may be altogether out in his calculation of averages and probabilities; but there are certain instincts by follow-

ing which a woman seldom errs, and which bring chance within the bounds of certainty. Georgie meant to be a prophet, not only in her own country, but in her own behalf,—which was much more to the purpose.

CHAPTER VI.

CONSULTATION.

"I have no exquisite reason for it, but I have reason good enough."
—SHAKESPEARE.

"Then did all sternness melt, as melts a mist;
And so reserve relented by degrees."
—HENRY TAYLOR.

THE mission intrusted to her by Major Tynte did not long remain unfulfilled by Lavinia. In his letter he entered very fully into the past history of Hugh Scottowe; the bar-sinister of a previous generation; his intense family pride (which so strangely always manifests itself with tenfold force under such circumstances); his questionable, but not intentionally criminal, dealings with Hinch, which so nearly brought him within the grasp of the law; his enlistment, and

his marriage; the state of his young wife's health—which was such as to urgently call for female sympathy and help — and her trouble at parting, under such trying circumstances, from her husband. The major felt that in appealing to Lavinia he did not appeal in vain.

As a matter of courtesy, aunt Polly had to be consulted about the whole business. Now, though she was an extremely discreet and proper person under ordinary circumstances, she was not wise in the course she took when the facts were laid before her. She spoke dubiously about the whole business, counselling caution, which nettled Lavinia.

"Won't you make inquiry first, dear?" she asked. "Wouldn't it be well if you did?"

"Oh, of course!"

"Well, how do you propose to inquire?"

"I mean to go myself and do it," said Lavinia, decisively.

This was directly the reverse of the precautionary step which aunt Polly desired, and left the difficulty still an initial one, from her standpoint.

"Couldn't you send Thomas? or Jane could go, after she clears away the things, just to—to bring you word, and have a look round."

"I'll go myself," said Lavinia, as decisively as before.

"Why?"

"Because Jane is better-looking than I am, and—she is not a lady. Ladies do not run half such a risk as servants do. But, in any case, there is no danger. The neighbourhood is not a low one. I know where the street is, and I am going in broad daylight. Major Tynte expressed a wish that I should befriend this poor lonely woman, and I mean to. There is simply nothing

in the wide world which I could do that I would not do for him, putting common humanity aside altogether."

"My dear, he does not ask you to be—indiscreet. Suppose—I only say suppose—that this woman is not——"

Lavinia took her up short. "I know what you mean, but I don't care whether she is or she isn't—not one straw."

"But——"

"Let me finish. You have only part of my answer—concerning myself; the other part, concerning the major, is, that he is a gentleman. When he wrote he believed so far in me as to feel that what is called 'indiscretion' would not stop me. It would require a social five-barred gate to keep me back now from fulfilling his request."

"I didn't mean to keep you from ultimately fulfilling it. I only say suppose——"

"But I won't suppose! When he wrote that letter he must have written it with

a sense of obligation hanging over him. He was asking a favour: there is none now. He must have said to himself, 'Though she has rejected me, still I may rely on her to do me this one kindness,' and so he might: that was when we were—estranged. You know our relations are quite different now; and if it was necessary to die for him, I would die—much less go on a simple mission of charity."

Poor aunt Polly! She had done so much, as we know, and had done it so cleverly, to bring about that last momentous interview with the major, which had resulted so satisfactorily, that it was very hard to be sat upon in this fashion, and she felt it momentarily. "Remember that I did not volunteer my opinion, Lavinia," she said, "and I did not mean anything I uttered to be tortured into indirect censure of yourself, or into dispraise of Major Tynte."

"I know you didn't, you dear old thing!"

exclaimed Lavinia, embracing her with an impulsive suddenness which seriously disarranged her head-gear. "There! are you in good humour again?"

"Oh yes, yes, dear," said aunt Polly, endeavouring to rearrange what was left of her back hair, and to straighten her cap.

"Because if you are not, I'll do it all over again."

"Why did you consult me at all," she asked, speaking with a hair-pin between her lips, "if you meant all the time to have your own way? you—creature, you!"

"Why? Well, of course, I consulted you just as everybody asks for advice from people they are fond of."

"Without intending to take it?"

"Yes; without in the least intending to take it—if it wasn't what was wanted. One always goes in for advice on chance, meaning to do as one likes in any case; but if the advice happens to fall in with one's own

views, it gives one additional courage and satisfaction. I should like to have had the moral support of being able to say—That's just what aunt Polly suggested."

"But it just isn't — you aggravating creature!"

"No, it is not; but it is a point gained to know exactly what you think, even though you pronounce against me."

"You would not let me explain."

"It wasn't necessary. Come away from the door, and let us sit down here. I want to talk to you in a whisper. Now, if this girl is not Scottowe's wife, she may all the more need a woman's help and good influences to save her from herself in her despair; and, as I said before, all I can do shall be done at once—to-day—even if I have to follow her into the lowest haunts of iniquity. I don't mean to blench or fail. I am determined to show myself worthy of the trust reposed in me. You must not thwart me."

"I know, my dear. You mean you won't stand opposition."

"I do. I mean that; but I mean more. I mean that you must help and encourage me instead; and if I am abused, stand up for me. If I only get a good chance at Mrs Grundy, won't I scratch her face! and I'll expect you to do the same! Don't look at me as if you thought I was going crazed, because I'm not. I'm perfectly sane."

"My dear," retorted aunt Polly, "don't you know that crazed people always think that?"

"Well, I am satisfied in my own mind of this—when the major wrote the letter, he was perfectly convinced that he was not asking me to do anything which would compromise me in the smallest degree: that is a sane and rational conclusion to come to."

"Well, it is, and I agree with you; but

all the same, people are sure to say that it is queer."

"Who? Mrs Grundy—pish! What do I care?"

"But you should."

"But I shouldn't! Don't let us fall out again, as you know the consequences; and besides, as I said before, I want your help. You have great influence with Mr Pipperly."

"Oh, stuff!" said aunt Polly, looking indifferently indignant, but pleased withal. This to the casual observer would seem an impossible aspect; but in reality it is not so.

"You may say 'stuff' as often as you like, but you know it is true," said Lavinia, holding up a warning first finger to indicate that her assertion must be accepted, and not argued about; "and I am very glad that it is true, because I mean to basely trade on it. I am going to ask

him to advise me to do what he will consider a very foolish thing, and—I want you to back me up."

"Upon my word!" was the only gloss which aunt Polly found ready.

"I must have entirely my own way in this too; and I want you to keep him in order, and not let him give me too long a lecture."

"My dear, I have very little power over Mr Pipperly."

"You must exercise the whole of it, whatever the amount, against your own judgment and common-sense, and entirely in the way I wish."

Aunt Polly gave in. "I do really and truly believe," she said, after a long endeavour not to promise till she knew,—"I do really believe that if you asked me to stand on my head, I'd do it for you at last."

"I should be very sorry to ask you to

do anything of the kind," said Lavinia, "because I am quite certain that Mrs Grundy would be horrified to a far greater extent than she is likely to be by any impropriety of mine. But, now that you have promised, I'll tell you everything, and let you into the plot. First of all, I mean to purchase the old hall and grounds of Scottowe."

"To live there?"

"Perhaps; but that's quite a secondary consideration."

"As a speculation?"

"Well, no; not that—at least not a monetary speculation, but as a sort of—of—moral speculation. I didn't think you'd have been half so inquisitive, or I should have been better prepared to explain."

"But it seems such a very odd notion."

"Does it? Why don't you call it foolish?—I know you are dying to. I won't be a bit angry."

"Well, it *is* foolish," said aunt Polly, reassured by the last statement.

"Suppose I admit that? I'm going to have my way all the same. The place has been in the hands of the lawyers for ever so long. I don't in the least understand the case, though I have been trying to make it out, and have read ever such a lot in the papers about it lately. People seem to be connected with it of whose names I never heard, and to have interests of a complicated nature. The only part of the proceedings which I cared about was the order made by the Court for its sale, and to-day I see the advertisements are out. I am going to bid for it—that is, I am about to ask Mr Pipperly to see after it, and to get somebody to bid on my behalf. First, he must go and see it. Not that I want him to; but he is so dreadfully upright that he won't be satisfied unless he does so, and comes back and does

his very best to put me off—which he won't succeed in. Now, if you could only persuade him to do what I want without any botheration, I'd say that you were undoubtedly the very best of aunts!"

"My dear, he would not pay the smallest attention to me." It pleased her to hear these little speeches refuted.

"I'm quite certain he'd do more for you than for me or anybody else."

"Oh, stuff! You flatterer! He would not do *that*, I know. I don't consider it wise myself."

"That means that you would tell him to go against me. If you dare! Only just think: Scottowe is quite close to Tyntern, the major's place. At least it will be his, and it would be so nice to be near him," said Lavinia, as if she meant that they were to be merely neighbours.

"Oh," said aunt Polly, "do give me credit, my dear, for some sense! When

you have got *him* you won't care for Scottowe, I'll engage. There must be some other reason for you wishing to have the place."

"Well, there is: I may as well tell you at once. I want to save it, and to give it back to this young soldier out of the regard I entertain for him."

"For him? And you have not even seen him!"

"I mean regard for the major."

"Well, if you call even that a reason, there is no use in talking sense to you any more. You must be really demented, child!"

"I distinctly remember," said Lavinia, raising a minatory first finger, "that when we stood over there watching the 201st going away, you resented the assertion hotly when I made the self-accusation. Should I have believed myself then, or shall I believe you now?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, for the life of me," was all aunt Polly could say by way of explanation.

"Suppose we both acknowledge that we were mistaken. I'm not in the least demented, I assure you. I am only in love —ever so much—over head and ears, as people say. I am determined to fully merit the first confidence reposed in me by the man who has asked me to be his; and to do so most effectually I must buy Scottowe. It may go cheap, and it may not —but I'll secure it."

"You mean in trust—from what you said?"

"Yes; I mean in trust."

"Upon my word, Lavinia!—not going quite so far as madness, I must say I never thought you were such a goose. Even if you do buy it in trust, now, do you ever expect a common soldier-man to be able to pay you back?"

"Oh! I'm sorry to say I am a bigger goose than even this shade of a possible repayment implies," said Lavinia. "I didn't mean a pecuniary trust. I called the purchase a moral speculation a few moments ago; and as a natural consequence the trust becomes a moral trust."

"Ah! ridiculous nonsense, child! Do you mean that you will buy it with your own money, and then—give it away?"

"That's what I am really and truly driving at. I was just beating about the bush, because I was afraid to speak out."

"Pish! you are not afraid to do as you like in spite of everybody."

"Well, I am a bit inconsistent now and then: we are all so, more or less, and I'm more so. But you ought to be strictly accurate, you know. I did not say in spite of everybody, only in spite of you and Uncle Pipperly."

Both laughed at the premature announce-

ment of relationship; but there is many a true word spoken by accident as well as in jest. Aunt Polly wondered just then how much Lavinia knew; but, as she could not tell by scrutinising the open countenance before her, she turned the subject back again.

"Suppose," she blurted out, "suppose, after all your trouble and expense, that the soldier gets killed and never comes back from the war."

She meant Scottowe of course; but she would have given worlds never to have uttered the words, when it was too late to recall them. Lavinia's face blanched suddenly, and her eyes filled with tears. The association of ideas could not be avoided, for the connecting links were too close. The major was in as great danger as the common soldier; and the possibility that he might never return was momentarily too much for her. Silence was best for a while, till she recovered herself.

"You poor dear thing!" aunt Polly then said soothingly, and kissing her cheeks alternately again and again, "you must not mind a stupid old addle-headed creature like me. I could bite my tongue right off, so I could. You just cheer up and come with me, and we'll see and manage Mr Pipperly, and do our very best. Let me look at you."

"Oh! I'm all right," Lavinia explained. "Didn't you guess that I was only shamming, just to soften your hard heart. Now I have succeeded, I am quite happy and satisfied."

"But are you really and truly all right?"

"Perfectly."

"Let me look." With a hand on each temple, she gazed lovingly into the deep honest eyes of her niece. Then there followed another free gift in the shape of a final kiss, and the two walked off together out of the room, and on to the stair-landing.

"Now," said Lavinia, "you just, like a dear, go and talk to Mr Pipperly, and prepare

him for the task that lies before him. He'll have to go first to Scottowe to see the place." She ticked off on her fingers as she spoke. "Then he'll have to come back here, to try and dissuade me from buying. Then he'll have to go up to London to talk to the lawyers, and to complete the purchase. He'll be as mad as a hatter with me, I know; but you are solemnly pledged to be on the side of the goose."

"Very well. If I must I must. Come to my room and rest, and just take things quietly for an hour or so."

"I mustn't, I couldn't, really," said Lavinia, going down-stairs. She paused halfway on the second flight, holding the handrail, and looking up with that expression which, though so familiar to aunt Polly, always touched her,—it was so soft and yet so strong, so love-seeking and yet so self-sustained. She leant over and spoke down.

"Tell me, then, where you are going."

"To see the woman—Mrs Scottowe."

"No!" said aunt Polly.

"Yes, really."

Then, as an alternative, "May I come?"

"Not on any account. I must go by myself first. I'll come back and tell you all the news; and then, perhaps, we'll go together." As if a sudden inspiration struck her, she added, "Perhaps I'll bring her to see you."

This staggered the elder lady, because it was just like what Lavinia would do; because as the house was Lavinia's it was what she had a perfect right to do; because if she did it, there would be no end of talk; because it was quite uncertain whether the woman was married or not, and if she once got in, it might be hard to get her out; because Jane might resent the intrusion, and there might be complications with Thomas (whose wife did not live in the house). All these

thoughts crowding on one another were too much for Aunt Polly, and she retreated to the privacy of her own apartment to consider them in all their bearings, while she "did up" her back hair. Presently she heard the hall-door slam, and knew that Lavinia had gone. It occurred to her that she ought to send either Jane or Thomas out after her; but Lavinia might be angry, and there was really no danger. So she decided to possess her soul in patience, and awaited developments.

If the worst came to the worst, she could —no! come what might, she would never desert Lavinia, nor lose sight of her till she became the absolute and priceless property of the gallant major.

Still she could not get this Scottowe business out of her head; it bothered her.

"It all comes from a foolish inconsiderate marriage," she said to herself. "A pair of imprudent silly lovers, without a penny to

live on, just go and——" She never finished the sentence, because the search for a lost hair-pin diverted her thoughts. I'm sorry for this, because aunt Polly was a person whose opinions I should like to have ascertained on this burning question of the foolishness of poverty falling in love and getting married, and the possible after-consequences, obligations, and responsibilities.

Fortunately for us commonplace people, the unwise are an enormous majority; our personal sense of inferiority would otherwise become unbearable to ourselves. "*Stultorum plena sunt omnia.*" This was a fact before Thomas Carlyle proclaimed it. But the difference between the city mouse and the country mouse is only one of degree; and the wisest of metropolitan sparrows will build in a rain-shoot. The storm bursts and the floods come; her house and family are swept away. Her rustic cousin chirps, "How silly!" But if, after all, the weather only

holds up, and the city mother rears her feathered family and starts them safely on "their own hook," how wise she is, compared to this country cousin, who built her nest in the hedgerow, and had her family murdered by marauding schoolboys. Therefore I say again, "*Stultorum plena sunt omnia.*" The data on which we found our conclusions as to wisdom are not absolute or stable, but relative and shifting; and circumstances over which we have no control may shape precisely similar actions into either sense or nonsense.

There is no certain platform for "the superior person" to orate from. For my part, I prefer to take up my position among the majority; and when I see a result, I venture to prophesy.

With regard to marriage, the initial step may always be considered risky; but the most foolish venture from a worldly point of view, may—as I know—give the lie to

croakers, while the reverse holds good with equal force, and the "great match," based on the keenest maternal foresight, ends, how many times too often, in disastrous failure? Therefore it is that any little wisdom one has, and on which one can rely, comes after the event. You say the cumulative experience of society and of everyday life should count: perhaps it should; but in some things it doesn't—notably in love.

If you pull through all right, you are clever and to be congratulated; if you don't, you are a fool, and not to be pitied: in either case the result gives the cue for the verdict.

I have heard aunt Polly herself declare—to pursue the bird illustration—that she considered the ostrich silly because it lays its eggs in the sand, and then runs away from them. This I consider grossly unfair; and doubly so, coming from aunt Polly.

I hold that the ostrich is a religious bird, showing a large trust in Providence, when she leaves her offspring to be hatched by the sun. There are persons who prefer the method of the cuckoo. In any case we have to reckon not only with the ostrich and the cuckoo, but with the homely and more prolific goose, who makes shift to fulfil her obligations without forethought or cunning—and somehow generally manages to do it; with the unsuspicious hen, who rears a progeny of ducklings, and suffers agonies in her anxiety to keep them from getting wet; and with the free-and-easy duck who waddles through life without troubling herself about the moral obligations of maternity. The subject is, in fact, too large for a mere fictionist to discuss at the end of a chapter; and we must reluctantly leave it where we found it.

CHAPTER VII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

"I this infer,
That many things, having full reference
To one consent, may work continuously;
As many arrows loosed several ways
Come to one mark."
—SHAKESPEARE.

THOUGH it never occurred to the collective mind of Westerly as within the range of possibility that the Rev. Joseph Tinkler could ever be anything else but curate there, still, when it became known beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Bishop had actually promoted him, there was general joy mixed with general regret, which manifested itself in various ways, and the community cast about for the best means of conveying to him its sense of his sterling

worth. The first person to focus the sentiment, and to bring matters to a head, was the shrewd and sensible Georgie.

She lost no time either, but waylaid and interviewed her father on the subject immediately.

"Papa," she said, "you must really get up an address and presentation at once."

"Me, my dear?"

"Yes, you. Somebody must start the thing, you know. It only wants a beginning."

"But wouldn't it come better from the men of his own cloth, Georgie?"

"No, it wouldn't. They'll all be more or less jealous of him, as a matter of course—it is only human nature. You are a very old friend of his, and I—well, you know, now, that I have reasons of my own for wishing to have the business carried through successfully."

He looked at her with a pretence of not

understanding—only a pretence—an obvious make-believe.

"There! don't humiliate me by driving me to be needlessly explicit. You understand well enough, you dear old man; so don't pretend. Everybody will take it up the moment you start it."

"Well, suppose I do."

"Don't suppose it at all. I want you to."

He laughed. "It is more easily said than done."

"No, it isn't. It is quite easy to do. You are parish churchwarden. Ask Mr Stole to give you the schoolhouse or the vestry-room for a private preliminary meeting of the men. Tell him he must take the chair. Speak at once to a few of the influential parishioners—a few of them will do to set the ball rolling. You are always dropping on them about the town. I'll work the ladies through Lavinia Harman. Mr Stole will work the clergy, when the laymen and

women are once set going. I must not make myself too glaringly prominent, because—you know," said Georgie, pulling up short.

"I know, my dear," acquiesced the doctor. "I hope and trust, I'm sure, for all our sakes, that there won't be any hitch."

Whether he meant a hitch as to Georgie's prospects of success in her project with reference to winning Tinkler, or a hitch in the getting up of the testimonial, I am unable to say; but in any case, he thought that people would probably be making unpleasant remarks by-and-by at his expense. But let those who win laugh; and the game was clearly worth the candle. He nerved himself accordingly.

"Well," he said, "all right, Georgie. I'll give the hint at once to Vickers, the other churchwarden. He is an active little man, and has a high opinion of Tinkler."

"Everybody has," put in Georgie, parenthetically, for her own comfort and satisfac-

tion as much as anything else. When you mean to marry a man, it is, I suppose, a gratification to hear him praised, and to praise him one's self. "The school children must be brought into it too," she said, helping him on with his outside coat; "it would be nice to have an address from them, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, it would—undoubtedly."

"You are the best papa in the world," said Georgie; and here she kissed him impulsively.

"But what is it to be?" he asked, taking up his stick—"an illuminated address, and a handsomely bound Bible and Prayer-book?"

"Bible and fiddlestick! good gracious, no! A purse of sovereigns, of course. Don't you know that it will take ever such a lot to furnish his rectory? Westerly ought to be able to make up three hundred pounds at the very least."

The doctor stole a furtively queer look at Georgie.

"Well, papa! do you really think me mean and sordid? I am not—not one bit; but I flatter myself that I am sensible."

"But—my dear——"

"Oh, to be sure! you just think, as mamma does, that I am counting my chickens a little too soon. I am perfectly certain that he likes me very much, and only wants encouragement, and I am absolutely determined to be the best of wives. You think it is horrid to be so business-like about it all, and unwomanly. But it isn't really unwomanly. We are all very much the same in one respect—I mean about marriage and all that. The only difference in my case is that, instead of keeping it all to myself, I resort to the very unusual course of making a confidant of my papa. Fathers are generally kept in the dark, that's all. You just wait and see

what happens. After all, results are the only reliable tests."

He said results were not tests, and never could be. Evidently he was not quite satisfied.

"Well, I can't argue; but is it that you don't think I am good enough for Mr Tinkler," she asked, "speaking honestly?"

He had to answer so plain a question. "Honestly, I think you are, Georgie."

"That's enough for me. Mamma thinks me dreadful because I speak out bluntly what other girls only think and keep to themselves: that's all the difference I can see."

The doctor felt he ought to say something in the nature of approval of his wife's views, if only for the look of the thing.

"Well, there is a certain amount of female reticence, my dear Georgie—of maidenly reserve and all that; and your mother naturally feels that young girls——"

"Yes, of course; but it is only sham—only hypocrisy on the part of girls—mock modesty—pretending that they don't care about men, and don't want to be married."

"But it—goes a long way." This was feeble, but on the instant he did not see his way farther.

"In taking people in," said Georgie, finishing the sentence for him.

"I didn't say that."

"No; but I did. It wouldn't go so far if people were not such idiots about girls."

The doctor was buttoning the last button of his gloves as he held out his cheek for another kiss.

"My dear Georgie," he said, "if make-believe were a patent medicine, a huge fortune could be got out of it."

"Yes, papa; and I daresay it enters into your prescriptions sometimes—doesn't it?"

"Well, just occasionally. I don't mind telling you in strict confidence." He laughed.

So did she. "It is a funny world, isn't it? Do you know—just wait a second while I tell you—I went to the station yesterday about a parcel. You have to pass by the windows of the refreshment-room to get to the parcel office. Well, I saw that handsome barmaid with the flaxen hair, that Captain Tiptop used to spend hours talking to, making sandwiches. She was actually spanking the bread on to the ham with the palm of her hand. Now, you know that if you asked for one of these at the counter she would not touch it except with a plated-tongs sort of an affair—half fish-slice, half salad-fork; and you never would suppose her capable of spanking it beforehand, would you? That's the sort of nonsense that goes on every day—only you don't know it."

The doctor laughed again. We said, I think, that Georgie was slightly vulgar. He did not see it. He merely thought her smart.

Now it appears to me, pursuing the line of reasoning suggested by this conversation, that the socialities of life—if I may coin a word—require for their satisfactory working a certain amount of ignorance. If a little learning is a dangerous thing, too much knowledge is not by any means conducive to one's comfort and satisfaction. Not only were the sandwiches at Westerly Station good, but the soup supplied to the hungry traveller by this same barmaid was excellent. Possibly Georgie might object to it also, on the ground that its merits were to be attributed to the fact that the scraps of meat and bones off the plates went into the stock-pot. The belief has always, I confess, deterred me from indulging in it. This is a case, therefore, in which, clearly, I should gain by lack of knowledge; because, as I said, the soup is good. To be honest, it is not necessary that the cook should proclaim the secret of the manufacture; and all the

requirements of probity and rectitude are fully met by the article being excellent of its kind. Therefore, I say again, it is to our own loss that we know too much.

Make-believe is the best working substitute for knowledge. You sneer and shake your head. Well, what is there socially of greater potency? For myself, I can truly say that I have never lost faith in make-believe since those early days when I bestrode the painted stick with the horse's head on it, and did all the trotting with my own two legs. Now let me ask you, as a person of sense, what reputation, except your own, has not contained a little—just a little—of this ingredient? I acknowledge a suspicion of it even in my own case — nothing more. Now that my philosophy (such as it is) has developed into a mellow blend of optimistic agnosticism, I find myself not only acknowledging the influence of make-believe in this world, but asking

questions — vain questions — as to how far it penetrates into the pathless depths of that undiscovered country from whence there is no return.

A wise physician like Dr Collyrium, knowing its efficacy, administers it and eases his patient, while he adds to his own reputation. The prescription is safe, sound, and agreeable. The world could ill afford to do without it.

A train of thought something akin to this was evidently running through the doctor's mind, because he said to Georgie, "You know, my dear, it would never do for everybody to get behind the scenes. If a patient wanted to find out all the ingredients in my prescriptions I should never pull through. I have had to set matters right, in some cases, by mere toast-water, with a dash of something nasty in it; and even by bread-pills, made up by myself. Now, what do you say?"

"Well, I really hardly know what to say, papa. I suppose you rolled the pills up in the palms of your hands, too. You are, it appears to me, quite as bad as the barmaid. I think—in fact, I'm sorry to say that, on your own confession, you are a bit of a humbug, like the rest of us, though you have just been preaching the other way."

"Humbug! Tut, tut, my dear!" he replied, slapping her playfully on the shoulder, "that's too blunt."

"But you have admitted that we are all humbugs."

"More or less; but I must qualify the admission by saying that everything depends on the motive with which we practise deception."

"I doubt if that is sound morality altogether, papa. I fancy Mr Tinkler would not admit a distinction with such a difference."

"Whether he would or not, Georgie, I am

obliged, as a conscientious physician, to tell a fib occasionally, because it helps to cure. Some patients would die of fright if I didn't tell them there was no danger; and hope is often the best medicine. Therefore it is, I maintain, that motive is everything."

"Well, and what do you think of my motive?"

"I don't pretend to judge."

"Why, you illogical old dear, we have got into such a tanglement of agreeing and disagreeing, that I don't see my way out of it; so you had better go. But, don't forget what has to be done—this very day."

He got as far as the bottom of the steps, and came hurriedly back.

"What do you say to my asking Mr Pipperly to open an account at the bank? People going in could subscribe if he had a big card up."

"Capital!" said Georgie; "the best idea yet." And here she shut out the author

of her being in a most unceremonious fashion.

He went straight to the bank to transact some business, and took the opportunity of interviewing the manager in his private room.

Taking his leave he said, "You heard the news, of course?"

"What news?" asked Mr Pipperly.

"Why—about Mr Tinkler."

"What about him?" said Mr Pipperly, becoming suddenly interested.

"Is it really possible that you haven't? That's strange. Why, my dear fellow, it is all over the town."

"But I don't go all over the town, like a doctor," said Pipperly, growing both curious and angry. "Has anything serious taken place?"

"The Bishop has given him the fine living of Scottowe—that's all," explained the doctor.

"God bless my soul! I never heard a word of it. I'm glad, very glad, exceedingly glad."

"So is everybody," said the doctor; "and there is talk, even now, of getting up a testimonial."

"Nobody ever deserved one more," put in Mr Pipperly.

"By the by," said the doctor, rubbing his chin, as if the idea had but just come into his mind, "wouldn't it be capital in the way of a beginning if you were to put up a subscription card in the bank?"

"So it would! I'll do it at once," said the little man, delighted at the thought of being well to the front at the start. "Suppose we put you down first."

"I should not like to be number one," said the doctor; "but, after one or two others have signed, you may add my name for, say, ten pounds."

Georgie would have been delighted if she

had only been within earshot. Of course, as we know, there had been talk of getting up a testimonial. His words were literally true; but, to hear the doctor refer to it, no one would for a moment have supposed that the talk had been only between himself and Georgie. Then, again, the spontaneity with which the suggestion about the bank card came out! Who would have supposed that the thought was not born on the spot? Finally, he got credit from Pipperly for modesty in declining to sign his name first on the list, and for liberality in subscribing ten pounds.

Now, knowing as much as I know, shall we, too, set the doctor down as a humbug? I say, No! There was not a less deceitful man in Westerly. And in saying so, mind you, I speak advisedly; and I do not except even the Rev. Joseph Tinkler.

The remainder of the programme laid

down for him by Georgie he carried out with equal skill, tact, and success; and more than that, he succeeded in extracting a promise from Tinkler himself to drop in for a little music in the evening, as of course they "could not expect to see much of him soon."

What wonder if, after a hard day's work, he returned home with the proud consciousness of having done all that could in reason be expected of him, even by a more exacting daughter!

I don't think I ever saw Georgie looking better, or dressed with more taste. Her singing, too, was simply captivating, and the too susceptible Tinkler yielded to the spell.

Mrs Collyrium retired early, being indisposed; and the doctor took to his easy-chair and a book with his back to the piano, putting in a pleasant word now and then, and showing his interest

by asking for a particular piece of music or favourite song.

Going home to his lodgings late that night it came to Tinkler's mind somehow like a sudden revelation, that he would be lonely in his new rectory, if he should go there (for he still played with the *if*) without—somebody. Then the somebody changed into a wife, and the wife into Georgie. Here he blushed at his own presumption, then hope came to his relief. And so—knocked about by contending emotions, doubts, and aspirations—he went to bed and slept the sleep of the just, with an extra touch of felicity about it.

Georgie, on the whole, was well satisfied with the progress made. One thing only troubled her as she sat on the hearth-rug, leaning against her father's knees.

"Oh, papa dear," she said, "there is really and truly only one habit which must be broken off. I positively could not stand

it! He MUST NOT play the flute any more, after—if I marry him; it is so abominably, so frightfully unbecoming to him."

I quite agree with Georgie, and so did her father; because, to see the Rev. Joseph Tinkler's face when he played on that instrument "was enough," as old Mrs Fungus had remarked, "to make a cat laugh." The ridicule of her mother and sister drove even the flute-playing Minerva to look at herself in a fountain, with the result that she changed the instrument for a lute—and no wonder. But after all, this flute question is only a small matter of detail, which has for a moment, in consequence of its nearness, taken larger and more abnormally distorted proportions than the true principles of marital perspective may by-and-by assume.

The doctor sat up very late, after Georgie had said good-night, with no better company than his own thoughts. To be sure, his

doing so lessened the probability of finding his wife wakeful—which was a gain; and it gave him an opportunity of calmly reviewing the situation. He had the reputation of being a very sensible man; though on what grounds this reputation was built I am unable to say. A man may have it, and deserve it, without even himself knowing why—much less the general public. It may be based on one large and comprehensive quality, or it may be founded on scraps of character, so to speak. The only work by Cato the Censor which has come down to us perfect, is one in which he gives recipes for making cakes and preserves; and, by the by, that reminds me, it was this very Cato who said that there are only two ways of increasing an income—labour and parsimony; but he spoke merely as a male, for to the female there is another way—namely, matrimony. It was the *pros* and *cons* of Georgie's method that exercised the

mind of the doctor. The part he played in the game was peculiar and dubious—he felt that; but he had been led into it, and, on the whole, he did not regret or repent. He loved Georgie, and he had a very high opinion of Mr Tinkler.

Still there remained an uneasy feeling that it was, somehow, unmanly to help her to draw the net round this guileless creature. People would talk if they knew all. He felt himself getting into a corner. "Truth," says old Fuller, "hath often sought corners, not as suspecting her cause, but as fearing her judges; yet it is a great blessing that we may fully enlarge ourselves in our thoughts." Of both this verity and this blessing the doctor felt the full force, as he asked himself what old Mrs Fungus would say if she only knew the surprise which he fondly hoped was in store for her at no very distant date.

Whatever Mrs Fungus might say, I am

quite certain that she would be only too glad to hear that Tinkler had proposed for one of her own daughters; and she has to learn by experience, like the rest of us, that the sun may do his duty though her grapes remain sour. There is no accounting for things, or for the seeming contradictions which abound in this very inexplicable world. You even get fresh fish out of a briny ocean; and it is on land, and in fresh water, that they are made salt, though they have been all their lives in pickle. Endless difficulties beset the speculative mind, and there is no way out of the complexity save by the unsatisfactory formula of "Who'd have thought it!" What wonder, then, if the doctor gave it up, and went up-stairs to bed, doubtful whether his action deserved praise or blame from outsiders, and (I must say also) very indifferent on the point!

Mrs Collyrium admonished him mildly as to the ill effects of remaining up so late

—a man who was liable to be called up at all hours—and he felt that he deserved to be admonished, and did not resent or attempt a defence.

He forgot to wind his watch—a most unusual omission for him; Georgie forgot to say her prayers—which was equally unusual on her part; and Tinkler forgot to look into the letter-box before he went up-stairs, as he was wont to do—which was just as well, because it contained a short note, which would have seriously disturbed him, if it did not keep him out of bed. It ran:—

"*Dear Joe,—Come and see me at once.* 5 *Vigo Street. Affectly., Kate.*"

CHAPTER VIII.

VIGO STREET.

> "Her worst of grief is only
> The common lot which all the world have known."
> —Hartley Coleridge.

Lavinia walked. At first she thought of taking Thomas and the brougham, but finer feelings prevailed. She concluded that it might be wiser not to parade grandeur at the expense of one who might under the circumstances, perhaps, conclude that she was stuck-up and proud. She would see who and what Mrs Scottowe was; as she wished to be kind and friendly, and would not jeopardise first impressions, which always go for much, especially among women. Lavinia was impulsive and incautious in many ways, but never

when tact and delicacy were required; and she felt the occasion to be critical. If the initial step turned out a false one, she felt that she could not retrace it, and that her influence might be gone. It behoved her, therefore, to be cautious, and so she went on foot.

The Bishop's wife, in a close carriage behind a spanking pair of high-stepping bays, passed her by on the way, and then suddenly pulled up close to the kerbstone —thus clearly intimating that she wished to be civil and to have a chat with the pedestrian.

After mutual greetings and inquiries of the usual description, Tinkler fortunately occurred to the elder lady as an opportune subject of conversation.

"You heard, of course, that the Bishop has promoted him — or at least offered promotion."

"Oh yes," said Lavinia. "I always felt

that his lordship would pick him out sooner or later."

"Did you? And why, my dear?"

"Because — well — he is not like other bishops, and there are few clergymen more deserving."

"Either you mean that as a very high compliment to my husband, Miss Harman, or the reverse as applied to his episcopal brothers generally."

"No; I mean both together. I mean that he looks out for sterling worth and recognises it, which is not believed to be the characteristic of his order."

"I'll tell him what you say. I am sure he will be very pleased, as he has such a high opinion of you."

"Of me? Oh, I beg of you not to do anything of the kind! I shall be quite ashamed if you do. The idea of my presuming to pat a bishop on the back! You really must not."

"Very well. Now, will you jump in? Can I drop you anywhere?"

"Many thanks; no. I am going down the next street. Quite a short way; just to make a call."

So they parted, Mrs Quodlibet going off to see the Rev. Septimus Stole on important business of her own, in reference to a cheaper edition of her work, 'The Dual Genesis; or, The Old Adam and the New,' for which he had undertaken to write a preface and an appendix, and which was announced in the religious publications as "in the press." Poor Stole! This little bit of literary vanity on the part of his diocesan's wife was his only thorn in the flesh; but who should pity him after all, considering what he got in return? The palace was free to him; he had the ear of the Bishop at all times, and a fair share of the wire-pulling sometimes; and in playing his cards he always found her an ex-

cellent partner. With her on his side he stood to win; and of course we can't in this world expect to have all the smooth without the rough. Ninety-nine out of a hundred among the clergy would have jumped into his shoes if they got the chance, and, no matter how much of a misfit, would have borne all the pressure on their corns with Christian fortitude and benignant smiles; for there is always preferment in the atmosphere of an episcopal palace, and one never knows what may turn up. To be sure, in this case there were no daughters. When a bishop has them, if they are young and nice, they can pick out curates for themselves, and a private chaplain always has a good chance; if they are old and nasty they can mate accordingly: and in either case the bishop provides for them — in the diocese. Stole was ambitious, but he did not miss the daughters. He was not a

marrying man, and was most fastidious and particular. The only woman in Westerly at all up to his standard of perfection was the one in whom we are just now specially interested; and he felt his chance in that direction to be hopeless, though he did not know that it actually was so.

Lavinia was not long in reaching the end of her journey, nor in gaining admission. The door of No. 5 Vigo Street was open, and the landlady was looking out. The place and its surroundings were respectable, and the woman clean and kindly-looking, which was so far satisfactory. "There is a lady staying with you—a Mrs Scottowe—is there not?"

"There is, Miss; but I don't know whether you can see her: she has been very poorly, poor thing, and the clergyman has only just come to her."

"The clergyman! Who?"

"Rev. Mr Tinkler, miss."

"Oh, that's very fortunate! I know him very well. But how did he find her out? Did she send for him?"

"Yes, miss; my little boy posted the letter."

"Would you mind telling Mr Tinkler that another lady wishes to see him for a moment?"

The woman knocked at a door in the hall, opened it, delivered the message, and disappeared. Presently the gentleman asked for responded to the appeal, shutting the door behind him.

"How are you, Mr Tinkler? I am so glad to see you, and also to be able to congratulate you. The Bishop——"

He looked the picture of abject misery as their eyes and hands met.

"I hope I am not disturbing you. She is not seriously ill? I just called to see her—the lady—Mrs Scottowe."

"My poor sister!" exclaimed Tinkler,

looking very embarrassed; "she is not ill —but—but——" He could not finish the sentence, even if Lavinia had given him time, as he seemed to be bewildered and wandering.

"Your sister! This is indeed an unexpected pleasure."

The words were conventional and commonplace enough.

"Ah!—pleasure," he repeated, in a disjointed sort of tone.

"Yes, certainly—pleasure. I may be of some comfort and assistance to her. May I go in?"

"Oh yes, to be sure," he said, recovering himself. "God bless you! I am so deeply obliged."

"Oh, not at all. But perhaps you would rather I went away and came back later on in the day. You must have so much to talk about."

"Oh no; now—now," he replied. There

was something so helpful and kind in her voice, and such genuine sympathy in her look, that he took courage from both, and would not let her go. "Come in, to be sure —at once." And he opened the door again, saying, "Kate, here is our old friend Miss Harman."

He stood dumb and grateful, looking on at the cordial greeting which took place. What a difference there was between brother and sister! They had not a feature in common. Eyes and hair were of a different colour; nose and mouth were of a different shape; the two might have been of a different race—of a different clime. Kate was fascinatingly beautiful, and her charm of expression was enhanced by the background of sorrow, which but served in her case to "throw it up," as painters say, while it had upon Tinkler quite an opposite effect. Trouble always seemed to make him less interesting—this was his misfortune. La-

vinia caught herself wondering which of the two took after the father, and which after the mother; but as the speculation landed her nowhere, she abandoned it.

Poor Kate soon brightened under the warm sunny influence of Lavinia, who seated herself on the sofa by her side, holding one hand lightly clasped in both her own.

A mutual confidence was established in a very short time; and gradually Kate's story unfolded itself before her friend—the happy courtship, the brief wedded life, and the disaster which followed fast upon the honeymoon: how Hugh had to fly—being innocent—leaving her to face the world alone, "without a single soul to care whether I lived or died. Ah no! dear Joe," she said, suddenly touched by remorse, "I didn't mean that. Come and sit here, on the other side by me."

He obeyed silently.

"You have two of the best and truest of

friends," said Lavinia; "your brother and me. You'll let me be a friend, too, won't you?"

"Why should I refuse? It seems a selfish way to accept so great a gift, but I have no other."

"I don't think friendship is worth much unless we are selfish about it, or jealous of it, which is much the same thing; and I shall be dreadfully jealous of your brother. He must go away for a bit, and let me have you all to myself. You are very weak and knocked up after all you have gone through. Everything will come right by-and-by. Now, I'll tell you what you must do. You must let me take you in hand, and be very obedient and good. I have a personal reason. Your husband is a dear friend of—some one—of a person who is very dear to me—Major Tynte."

"I often heard him speak of Major Tynte," said Kate. "They were at school together."

"And now they are in the same regiment—serving together. I won't make a secret of it any longer to you and your brother. I am engaged to Major Tynte, and one of the last requests he made to me was that I should look after Hugh's wife. I always do whatever I undertake to do; and I have made up my mind that you are to be my particular charge till they return. You are to come and live with me, and there will be no one to question our acts, or to interfere with us. It will be a real kindness to me."

"O Joe!" was all she could say, her eyes filling with tears as she looked towards him.

Thus appealed to, Joe had to speak. "Miss Harman," he said, "it is impossible to thank you as you should be thanked."

"I don't want to be thanked," said Lavinia.

"I know you do not; but I have settled that Kate is to come to me."

"Well, at all events, you might leave us for a little. I have a lot to talk about;

and I'll promise to drive her over to you in the evening."

"I was about to fetch a cab," he explained.

"Don't mind the cab."

So he went at last. It was wonderful what a lot of good it did Kate to have a big cry, with a really sympathetic woman like Lavinia by her side.

"I'm afraid it will be quite dreadful for poor Joe, all by himself, when he leaves Westerly," she said. "He wants me to go too, but of course I can't be so mean as to live upon him for ever so long; and besides he may get married, and——"

"You and she might not agree."

"We might not. I wanted Hugh to go off to New Zealand; but the fare was so expensive, and we really had not ready money enough, and—and—there was no time to be lost. You know——"

"Oh yes, I know," responded Lavinia, wishing to spare the poor thing as much

as possible; "but, my goodness! why New Zealand?"

"Oh, I forgot: you *don't know*, after all. How should you, when no one ever explained? There is a very kind friend of ours — I mean of Joe's and mine — living there. He is a very rich man indeed. He made a big fortune long ago, and took me and Joe and brought us up when our parents were dead; and got us into an institution which he founded himself, and had us educated—at least not me, because I was too young, but Joe, for the Church. We don't know much about ourselves, but he does; and he said he would help us whenever we wanted assistance if we wrote to him. We never did—for years. But after Hugh and I got married and were in trouble, I sat down and acknowledged that I was mean and shabby in writing to him then—but I could not help it. I told him everything, and I sent him our photographs, and asked

him to advise and befriend us still if he could. I know he is a good man, and I am anxiously waiting for his reply; but I can't have it for ever so long."

"Do you remember this good friend of yours?"

"Yes; just a little. I was very small then, but I know I loved him—so did Joe: Joe was a big boy."

"Was this man a relative?" asked Lavinia, becoming interested in the mysterious stranger.

"I don't know at all. I often thought he might be; but I had really no reason to suppose it."

"Except that he took such unusual interest in you."

"But he took equal interest in a great many other children. It seemed to be his hobby. He and a clergyman got up the institution we were in—I have the prospectus of it somewhere still. The clergyman

passed Joe on to a local bishop, who sent him to a relative of his, another bishop in England; and Joe would not come without me. We were mere waifs, you see, when we began the world—or, rather, when he began it with me holding on to him."

"Well, I do hope that this benefactor will come back to answer your appeal in person," said Lavinia. "How nice it must be to have such a friend! Men—or women—like that are rare."

"Oh, I wish with all my heart he would!" Kate responded, with a sudden clasp of her hands. "Perhaps he might."

"Doesn't your brother know any more than you do?"

"I think he must; because when I asked him on one occasion about our mother he was pained, but he was too truthful to tell a lie. He said just that her end, poor dear! was miserable; and he told me that it would be better not to ask any more questions, so

I never have done. The past seemed so awfully dark when I took that peep into it, that I have never ventured any further. And I have never told a soul but you."

"I will never tell a third, my dear," said Lavinia.

"I'd trust you with my life and soul," responded Kate; "I'm sure you are true as steel. Joe has a feeling that it is better to keep these things to ourselves, because he says there are persons so proud that they would not speak to me if they heard about how we were mere foundlings, and that our mother died in misery and trouble. I have often tried to pick a meaning out of those two words, but I couldn't."

"Better not, if he objects," said Lavinia. "You may know some time or other. Don't press him to speak. What troubles me now extremely is that I'm greatly afraid he'll want to take you away to Scottowe Rectory to house-keep for him, and then I shall be

so dreadfully disappointed; but if he does, I have a plan in my head for getting over the difficulty on my own account."

"Oh, I should dearly like to go for a bit, just to see the old Hall where Hugh's ancestors all lived in old times, and the church with their monuments. His chief ambition is some day to possess the place, and to die there and be buried in the family vault—though I don't see the smallest chance of that ever."

"Do you know that the Hall is to be sold?"

"Yes; he quite lost heart when he heard that. All the spare money he could scrape together went to a solicitor who was working to prove his claim; and just before he went away he must have heard some bad news which made him despondent. He never told me the particulars, because he said it would do no good, and would only make me sad, so I never pressed him."

Lavinia knew from the major; and our readers are in the secret since the night of the interview in the barrack between the two men. He naturally shrank from telling his wife that the brand of illegitimacy was upon him. There was nothing to be gained by such cruel frankness, even if his own pride had not been too great, and Lavinia did not betray him now.

"You had no idea that I intended to bid for it—and to get it too. I shall be doubly anxious after what you have told me. You know it is quite close to Tyntern, the major's place, and when I'm there you'll be welcome—you and your husband; and any time he likes, or is able to purchase, I'll sell it to him again."

"That's like buying in trust."

"Just the same."

"Ah, but poor Hugh will never, never, never have the money to pay for it!"

"You don't know that; and perhaps I

may grow generous and leave it to him in my will?"

"It is very nice to think of and to fancy; and it is sweet of you even to suggest such a joyful possibility. You give one hope and strength and courage, and make one ashamed of one's low spirits," said Kate.

"I'm very glad to hear it," responded Lavinia. "Low spirits are the very worst of company, and they grow upon one dreadfully, just as gambling and drinking and smoking grow upon men. They are nothing but a habit, and a very bad one."

She succeeded by her example in getting Kate out of the blues, and did her a world of good. The rest of the day passed so quickly that neither felt the flight of time till Joe, who had grown impatient and nervous, called back in a cab and took Kate home to his quiet lodgings.

Lavinia, when she saw them fairly off, took to her heels in most undignified fashion,

and never pulled up till she was at her own door, knocking impatiently for admittance. When she got in she made straight for aunt Polly's room, and sat herself down before her astonished relative in a state of bewildering heat and excitement.

"My dear, I began to get most uneasy about you. Where on earth——"

She didn't give aunt Polly time to finish.

"You'd never guess, if you were to try from this till doomsday. Who do you think she is?"

"First you say I couldn't guess, and then you ask me to. Do you mean Scottowe's wife?"

"Yes; I'll give you as many tries as ever you like."

"I'd rather give it up," said aunt Polly. "Put me out of suspense—there's a dear."

"Kate Tinkler! I told you you'd be surprised!"

"No; you never said a word about surprise."

"Well, I knew you would be surprised!"

"And so I am. The poor child! God help her! she's only a child."

"Nothing more," chimed in Lavinia.

"The last time she was on a visit to her brother I declare I thought it a sin to see her in long frocks. And she was so pretty."

"She's prettier now."

"My goodness!" was all that aunt Polly found to say by way of finish. It was brief but significant enough to Lavinia, who knew and had studied all her moods and phrases. It meant that all danger of opposition was over, and that she might befriend poor Kate with the full approbation of Aunt Polly.

But the day's excitement did not end here, for the post that evening brought her the first letter from the gallant major, and that night she sat down, flushed and eager to answer it without loss of time. It was a

source of the greatest joy to her to be able to say that she had so fully carried out his injunctions about Scottowe's wife.

I should, however, have thought her far too sensible a woman to have for a moment suspected that she would take his letter out of her pocket and deliberately put it under her pillow. Truth compels me to acknowledge that she did so.

CHAPTER IX.

SCANDAL.

> " Against a power like this
> What virtues can secure ?"
> —CRABBE.

> " Obtrectatio et livor pronis auribus accipiuntur."
> —TACITUS.

> " Pursue your trade of scandal-picking,
> Your hints—your innuendoes."
> —SWIFT.

I THINK it is Plautus who suggests that the mischief-maker who talks and the mischief-maker who listens should both be hanged—the one by the tongue and the other by the ears. But the remedy is far too drastic ; and we cannot utterly depopulate even the most morally congested district. In fact, Plautus is out of date. Formerly we put an end to a man who stole sheep or committed forgery :

now, when we hesitate to hang him for killing his brother, the mere murdering of reputations is nothing. Social victims have to bear it, and get accustomed to it—like the eel to being skinned. Joe Tinkler suffered rather severely under the first application of the process.

There was a less serious aspect, too, from which the situation could be viewed. We all have a tinge of vanity—mind, I say only a tinge. Perhaps he had as little as anybody could have; but when a man is fairly started on the pathway of social progress, got up as it were regardless of expense, with all eyes admiringly turned upon him,—it is dreadful to step suddenly upon a loose flag, and to be bespattered and begrimed by the contents of a dirty lurking puddle. This was poor Joe Tinkler's case. The scandal about his sister's affair spread and magnified and ramified in all directions.

It was not the fact of his a being clergy-

man only which added gravity to the case, but a clergyman just selected by his bishop for promotion.

The few who took the honest and charitable view were not listened to. Some who had already subscribed to the projected testimonial either openly confessed their indiscretion, or regretted the promptitude with which they had yielded to their more generous impulses. Others who had only begun to think of what they should give, held back just to see "how things would turn out." Old friends who used to stop to speak to Tinkler, and to shake hands with him whenever an opportunity presented itself, now passed on quickly, crossed over the street as if urged by important business, and merely nodded a head or waved a hand in the distance; and when two or three got together, they discussed the thing with bated breath.

The excitement was simply extraordinary

—the interest unprecedented. I am justified in saying so, because even Mrs Hush was drawn out of her shell by it, and rendered, for a time, quite chatty and relatively sociable. She was notoriously the most unsociable and stand-off of females in Westerly—so much so, that I have not dared to introduce her to my readers (I did not like to take such a liberty) as one of my characters: I merely do so now to add force to my assertion—feeling that by no other means can I give anything like the same amount of weight and point to it. Mrs Hush—or Mrs Major Hush, C.B.—was a very exclusive personage indeed. She lived and laboured for two objects in life—to preserve her complexion and to keep her distance, or make others keep theirs, which was practically the same thing. When, therefore, she unbent, it gave heart all round, and lent special interest to those who talked over the ugly business. Tradesmen forgot

that she looked upon them as a necessary evil, and professional men that she only recognised them because she could not help it. Canon Fungus and the minor clergy she usually treated with disdain; but now she condescended to talk to them, even in the street—she, whose pride was hurt by the fact that the Founder of Christianity was, humanly speaking, of "humble origin," and His disciples of such "low extraction."

Ah! my dear sir or madam, we, every one of us, live in glass houses, though we don't always know it. Each one is ready to pick holes. There is a fascination in the occupation unaccountable but obvious. When a horse is down we sit on its head: a crowd gathers, and there is much jabber; everybody rushes to unbuckle the harness, and to back the carriage; and, when the unlucky animal rises, we all skedaddle for fear of being kicked or spattered. We have our own opinions of how it happened, and why it happened, and

how it need not have happened at all—and so on.

But you and I never trip or come down—in our own estimation; and even if we did, I'd just like to see the individual who had the temerity to sit on our head! This, however, is digression.

The atmosphere had been so pure about the reputation of this poor curate and his sister hitherto, that, when people felt it suddenly charged with dangerous elements, and vitiated, they imagined it to be much worse and more deleterious than it really was. Their fears helped the panic, and their vision became jaundiced.

What were the facts? It was said that Kate had elected to run away with a common soldier, and that he had deserted her. There was no doubt about these two things, people said, to begin with. Her brother had taken her in and given her shelter: this was natural affection, putting sheer humanity

out of the question; and he was praised and pitied by the kind-hearted, while the bitter and the highly moral maintained that he should have acted differently, and sent her away, but that he was not morally strong enough to face such an ordeal as that. She was called, to be sure, on his statement, Mrs Scottowe. Mrs—well, there was the loose screw. How were respectable people to know? Any one could impose upon Tinkler. It was an extremely embarrassing situation, no doubt—for those who liked to be embarrassed. Several female genealogical moles set to work to burrow into pedigree traditions, and to hunt out the oldest inhabitants. They raked up the history of the unfortunate Mabel Scottowe—the only daughter of the last baronet—who ran away with the organist ages ago. It was surmised that Kate's "husband" was a son of hers, but the dates would not fit; and the wife of one of Pipperly's bank officials upset the ingenious

theory by stating positively that her husband had known his father and mother years ago, in London, and also the young man himself; and had, moreover, recognised his handwriting (which was a very peculiar one) on some documents which had lately come in to the bank. She was hardly thanked for so cruelly dispelling the illusion, because it increased the difficulty instead of tending to clear it. There was no gainsaying her story, however; and society in Westerly had to cast about in other directions—with no tangible result.

Jenkins, the leading solicitor, who took great interest in the legal aspect of the Scottowe law proceedings, declared positively that if not actually illegitimate himself, the young man must be the representative of an illegitimate branch, because he could otherwise claim the property now to be sold. "In fact, it couldn't be sold *at all* if a lawful heir existed," explained

the lawyer. The case was a very peculiar one indeed, and he couldn't go into it, but they might take his word for it: so they did.

The great question which agitated the community now was—Should the ladies call on Kate? A heavy responsibility rested on such a centre of "light and leading" as the wife of Canon Fungus; and she felt the full force of it. She was a woman who always saw a long way before her, and never made a slip for want of due thought and consideration. For instance, I never knew her to be short of a threepenny-bit for Sunday (and no doubt many a good shilling goes by negligence—a sacrifice to pride), nor to make a false step which landed her in any social difficulty. She was cautious to a degree. Of course she consulted the Canon. But he happened to be suffering from one of his dyspeptic attacks, and consequently she got but scant consolation.

"You heard about this Tinkler business, of course?" she said.

"I did. Not being deaf, I could hardly fail to hear what the whole town has heard."

"Well, thank goodness! one danger is over at all events." She was alluding to her son Joel's passing weakness for the parson's sister—to which we referred before. "And it might have been worse."

"So it might—for the girl," said the sardonic Canon. He did not believe in Joel; and he had a growing conviction in his own mind that his first-born would ultimately turn out a bad bird. The mother—holding quite a different opinion—never would let him enlarge on the point, which only made him the more bitter, and always on the alert to put in a word edgeways when he could: this was better than open rupture, which involved the loss of what he hadn't much of—temper. He contented himself with injecting into his conversation these pun-

gent bits of settled conviction, and leaving them to work, when he got the opportunity.

"What on earth are we to do? I wish you'd tell me."

"Do?" said the Canon. "If you took my advice—which I flatter myself you won't—you'd do nothing."

"You don't call that advice! It is absurd. We must do something."

"Very well. Go and do it." He looked at the wife of his bosom with a vacant stare, and then went on with his newspaper.

"You are enough to aggravate a saint!" she said, tartly.

"That's a mere assertion," responded the Canon. "I don't know that you have any means of estimating the endurance of a saint, except by computing from mine—who am a mere sinner. I know where to look for the aggravation; but the saint is not to be had for testing purposes."

"I suppose you mean to be crushingly

sarcastic. All the same, I think you ought to consult the Bishop."

"Whether I do or not, I certainly don't intend to consult the Bishop. He does not consult me; and you ought to know very well that when he picked out a lout like Tinkler for one of the tit-bits in the diocese, other men were passed over who should not have been passed over; and among them I have the assurance to place myself. He has got into a mess now, and let him get out of it."

"But wouldn't it be some sort of satisfaction, after his overlooking your claims, just to go and condole with him?"

"It might; but I don't care to snarl where I can't bite."

"Well, at all events, I'll go and see Mrs Quodlibet. I must know what she is going to do; because I'm not such a fool, at my time of life, as to be on the wrong side. If she takes her up, of course I must."

"Of — course — you — must. That's the woman all over. Play your own cards. I don't want to be bothered about it, one way or other."

Mrs Collyrium was another person equally exercised in her mind and equally perplexed; because, here was Georgie with a well-defined programme which involved actual contact and close permanent connection with this dubious brother and sister. She felt that there was nothing for it but to attack her daughter; and she resolved to do so without calling in the aid of her father, simply because—as she said to her dear friend Mrs Fungus — "men are such fools" about these things. Of course she did not tell Mrs Fungus all that Georgie had told her about the matrimonial scheme.

My lady readers do not need to have this explained; but "men are such fools"! True. There is such a difference between the *bête* and the *bonne bête*, that some of

us males, in our fatuous self-worship, believe too much in the *bonne*, and think ourselves clever.

"My dear, we really must make a stand," said the she-Canon; "we owe it to the sex. It is expected of us. Perhaps Mr Tinkler's sister *may* be Mrs Scottowe. I don't wish to be uncharitable; but we have positively no proof."

"None whatever," acquiesced Mrs Collyrium. The obligation coming under the denomination of "a debt which we owe to ourselves," is easily cleared off by a draft on our stock of self-complacency. "I hope I shall be able to influence Georgie, but she is very headstrong; and being an only daughter, I fear the doctor has let her have too much of her own way,—I don't mean in conduct, or acts, or anything of that sort."

"Oh no, assuredly not; she has always been very correct."

"But I mean," continued Mrs Collyrium,

not taking any notice of this remark, as being a mere truism, which went without saying, "that she has been allowed too much freedom of opinion."

"Yes—quite so. Young girls, nowadays, are so advanced that they fancy they have a right to their own opinions, no matter what their parents may think. I have always resisted this tendency in my children."

"Yes; and your daughters are perfection."

"Unless you begin very young with children, as I did, my dear, you can hardly ever hope to succeed thoroughly; and, mind you, it requires a strong constitution, as much as anything else."

This touch about the constitution was meant to be apologetic and consolatory, as applied to Mrs Collyrium, and to give her a loophole of escape as regarded her inability to cope with Georgie's self-will.

"I'm going to see Mrs Quodlibet at once. I daresay I'll be able to find out how she

and the Bishop will act; and I'll come and tell you on my return."

"You are so kind always!" said Mrs Collyrium, rising and ringing the bell, with a touchingly languid effort.

When the servant opened the hall-door to let out the visitor, Georgie herself appeared at the bottom step, looking animated and rosy, excited, and in a hurry.

There was a very (conventionally) cordial greeting and farewell combined.

"I was glad to see your mother looking so very much better," said the old lady.

"Oh, she's all right, thanks," responded Georgie as she disappeared.

Let me remark here, parenthetically, that if, after all, things came about the way Georgie had planned, it seems to me that, by-and-by, they would work very well. Her fibre was coarse; but Tinkler, as her husband, would not observe this, or miss the lack of high polish and refinement. He

had no close intimacy with her sex; Kate had lived away from him, and his mother was but a name, and a vague memory. Georgie seemed to be the perfection of kindness, goodness, figure, and face; and latterly, since she began to show consideration for and appreciation of himself, he grew more and more attached, as was natural; and his advancement was rapid and self-satisfying.

She was, just now, fresh from parting with him, and the ardent pressure of his hand showed that he was becoming alive to the possibilities which lay in the near future. She was in high spirits, and prepared for both attack and defence. And when she got into the house, she went directly to the drawing-room and opened fire—thus disconcerting the plans of the enemy.

"Now, mamma," she said on entering, "I know perfectly well what that horrid old cat has been here about. She has just

come to make as much mischief as she possibly can about what has happened. But I may tell you plainly that I don't care one single bit. It won't make one iota of difference to me—so don't think it."

"Georgie!" her mother exclaimed, with icy coldness, "you don't mean to tell me to my face that you would bring disgrace and shame upon us by—by—going any further with this—business—till at least the doubtful points are cleared up? You have only too often expressed your uncharitable opinions with regard to the Canon and Mrs Fungus, though you know how I respect them, and how it pains me to listen to you."

"I'm very sorry, I'm sure," said Georgie, dropping into a seat, with a doleful sigh.

"If you were you wouldn't so often err in the same way."

"Well, then, I'm not," said Georgie; "whichever you like." Her tone was defiant and dangerous.

"Let that pass. I want you now for once to listen to me. This is a most momentous matter, affecting others besides yourself. You must make a sacrifice. We can't expect everything to turn out always just as we should like it."

"No. Things will go by contraries in spite of all we can do. Even the Canon and his wife, who come as near perfection as may be, can't have things their own way. He has too little hair on his head, and must do without. She has too much on her chin, and can't get rid of it. While a benign Providence, for some mysterious reason—a good one, no doubt—won't let them effect an exchange." And she fretfully patted her feet on the floor.

"Georgie! Georgie! Georgie!" exclaimed her mother with a plaintive horror, which stopped the further flow of her eloquence, and took away her breath.

Georgie got up in a petulant fidget and

went to the window; and repented in a sort of way during a pause.

"If you wouldn't always fling that old man and his wife at my head, I would not say these things. If I know that you adore them, you know equally well that I detest them—at least her."

There was another pause. Mrs Collyrium wasn't up to time.

"Better come to the point," went on Georgie. "What do you want me to do about what you call—'the business'? Am I to suddenly drop my acquaintance with Mr Tinkler, and to cut his sister whom you used to embrace? Because, if that——"

"I never said that I meant you to go so far," said Mrs Collyrium, severely.

"How far then?"

"To abstain for a while from visiting them, till we know more."

"You are too late," said Georgie. "I've just been there, and I'm going again in the

evening to take Kate some books and have some music."

Mrs Collyrium interlaced her thin white fingers, gave a despairing sigh, looked up at the ceiling, and leant back, limp and mentally exhausted.

Georgie crossed to the door, and from this point of vantage fired her parting shot.

"You don't seem to be aware that Lavinia Harman actually went in the cab with Kate to her brother's lodgings. I think her example is quite as worthy as that of old Mrs Fungus; her position as good, and her character as high. If you were not unreasonably prejudiced, you ought to be satisfied, mamma; that's all I can say." And having said it she went away.

Now, was Mrs Collyrium unreasonably prejudiced?

You remember, reader, a remark made, in an early chapter, by the doctor himself, which bears upon the point we are consider-

ing. "It is most extraordinary the queer things that Miss Harman can do, and people not mind." Up to a certain point the doctor was strictly correct; but now, from his wife's point of view, and that of many others, the limit had been reached, and people did "begin to mind," as we know; for Westerly talked very freely about her action in this matter; questioned the propriety of it; and wondered that her aunt permitted her —while such delicate points of controversy remained doubtful—to show such active interest in Mrs Scottowe.

Georgie's excuse, therefore, did not satisfy her mother; and in common justice to her —Bohemian as I am—I must admit she had grounds for wishing that her daughter had acted with more circumspection. Having admitted so much, I am at liberty to say that I am, heart and soul, with Georgie and Lavinia.

The result of Mrs Fungus's visit to the

palace was that the Rev. Septimus Stole was sent by Mrs Quodlibet to interview Tinkler—ostensibly about her pamphlet, 'A Dual Genesis,' but really to find out as much as he could. It is but fair to Stole to say that he performed his delicate task with great skill and tact; for, without being in the least suspected by his brother cleric, he learned where the marriage took place, and how many months back. There were reasons why the ladies wished to be specially informed on this latter point. These facts were enough to enable him to write to the locality indicated, for confirmatory evidence from the local clergyman. He came away charmed by Kate—so much so, that for her sake he not only hoped for the best, but believed the best. In her lovely face there was nothing but truth and honesty—she could not deceive.

Confirmation came, as he expected, in course of post, and the most malignant of

the female scandal-mongers—among them Mrs Fungus (a wasp without her sting) — were silenced on the main issue at all events; whereat Stole rejoiced exceedingly.

Mrs Quodlibet—by nature a kindly soul —made up her mind to call, and did so, in her carriage. All this brought joy to the heart of poor Tinkler, because she put in an appearance just as his unsuspecting nature began awakening to the conviction that there was something up. People had become strange, somehow, and he couldn't fail to observe it. Fortunately, he had lately got to be so unconstrained, if not actually confidential, with Georgie, that he could speak freely to her; so he asked her point-blank to explain the state of things which puzzled him, and she did not hesitate to tell him pretty plainly what people were saying and hinting. It was a difficult thing to do, but she got through with it. He

listened, with pained and patient interest, uninterruptingly.

"And yet," he said, "to think of your exceeding great kindness all through, and that you never deserted—me—us—Kate."

"No; of course I didn't," said Georgie; "why should I be so mean and shabby? Miss Harman and I determined to face the spite and ill-nature because we liked your sister and—yourself; and we knew she was married."

"How proud—how thankful we should feel! How noble of you!"

"Not at all," replied Georgie. "You know we only did what was right, and papa quite approved." Still she liked to hear the praise, and to know that she was appreciated.

"Ah! very few of us do that," he said, looking into her eyes with manifest but bashful admiration. "I've been endeavouring to do it all my life, and I find it anything but easy."

"When there are two it always helps one," remarked Georgie, referring, I suppose, to her own sex, and to Lavinia as a case in point. The sentence was confused. She may have had a deeper meaning: be that as it may. It is but just to acknowledge that she fought her battle well; and held on, through evil report, to the course which she had set herself to pursue. The goal was to be reached; and the surest way to it was the road she took. She had argued it out with herself over and over again, and had come to some definite understanding with her conscience; and she felt that her programme must be gone through.

Does the end justify the means? Moralists say No. But there are two sides to everything; and it is just possible that the means may justify the end—occasionally.

After the favourable turn which things had taken, the Tinkler testimonial soon began to look up again. There were some

who became ashamed of their suspicions; and others who, instead of giving quickly, now gave doubly. The amount soon ran up to over four hundred pounds, as Tinkler learnt accidentally by going into Mr Pipperly's bank. The subscription-card stared him in the face, and he grew horribly ashamed and alarmed at its magnitude. He felt quite uncomfortable at the idea of accepting and owning so much money. It seemed wrong; particularly in the face of the fact that he had been advanced by the hand of Providence to opulence and the Rectory of Scottowe.

I have known of a very humble-minded countryman of my own, who, leaving his native wilds and visiting a great city for the first time, was too retiring to walk the grand streets and squares, and therefore sought out unpretending lane-ways to saunter in, from the ends of which he might, without too much presumption, gaze upon

the contiguous grandeur. The Rev. Joseph Tinkler looked at the world from such a standpoint. He was as humble-minded as this poor countryman; who, on his part would not, perhaps, have been quite so sensitive about the four hundred pounds as Tinkler was. But then, a parallel which runs on all-fours, and in which you cannot pick some small hole, is not easily found.

CHAPTER X.

A MATTER OF BUSINESS.

"My will is backed with resolution."
—SHAKESPEARE.

MR PIPPERLY found it utterly useless to remonstrate with Lavinia, or to advise her against the purchase of Scottowe. Touching financial questions she had been always open to reason till now; and never, up to this, had she refused to be guided by him.

"It is advertised at last," she said; "and it will probably go for a song."

Pipperly shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. "Don't flatter yourself too much with that idea. It is hardly likely to go for a song."

"Well, even if it takes a whole cantata, I must have it. So there!"

He never could logically face a woman's "So there!" Who can? To be sure she had plenty of money; and there was no reason why, if she liked to do so, she should not please herself by making this foolish investment. Even if the old house went cheap, it must have fallen, after so many years, into a woful state of disrepair and dilapidation, which would make it costly at any price; and it was in such an out-of-the-way corner, that she would not be likely soon to find a tenant. There was no earthly use in advancing these points now: he felt that he had arrived at strongly adverse conclusions without seeing the place; and she had made up her mind without seeing it either. Of the two, she had been apparently the more reasonable, since she promised to wait for his decision, after personal inspection, before she actually committed

herself; but, after all, this was only subterfuge, as he now learned when she was off her guard.

Of course only a woman would buy a pig in a poke—so, in his superior wisdom, he thought; it was all so unbusiness-like and absurd. To purchase the place at all was bad enough; but to do so in trust for somebody else who might not want it by-and-by, was little short of madness he said to himself. To be sure, Lavinia had a wild theory, fostered by the rhapsodical talk of this interesting Kate, that a millionaire friend, from somewhere or other in the colonies, was to turn up and square everything.

Did you ever know such nonsense? This Kate Scottowe had simply become an infatuation with Lavinia; and who or what was she? That was the question. Who knew? Her brother had dropped from the clouds some years ago; and Westerly had accepted him as heaven-sent—if not heaven-

born—without question. But what about this sister? Pipperly, as an astute man of business, did not "like the look of it." He was in duty bound to ask the question of himself; and the answer was not reassuring. She was the wife of a runaway common soldier, who was within an ace of being arrested and tried for complicity in very shady transactions connected with racing and betting; proofs of which, in the shape of compromising documentary evidence, were in the hands of the bank which Pipperly so ably conducted. To be sure, this same common soldier had voluntarily given these proofs of his own complicity in these transactions, for the purpose of putting the bank on its guard against Hinch. This in itself was a curious fact which puzzled the banker. Either the man did it out of a wish to embarrass his enemy Hinch; or he acted under the impulse of a twinge of conscience; or he and this pretty young wife

of his had together concocted a scheme which had for its object the very result which Pipperly now deplored, but had to accept at the dictation of Lavinia.

This last conclusion seemed to him the only one which could be accepted by a man of common-sense with his eyes open. The revenge theory was a strong one enough, as a motive, when it did not involve any self-risk; but in this case Pipperly felt that he must look deeper; and, having done so, the result of his scrutiny was the conviction that Kate and her husband were a pair of subtle, wily diplomatists, who unfortunately had got the start, and were now more than a match for him in this matter.

He was wise enough to see that any doubts thrown out against the good faith of either would only cause irritation, and he did not venture. But, it was clearly his duty, now, to visit the place before spending Lavinia's money, which he looked upon as

trust-money. Before doing so he resolved to have an interview with her again—this time in the presence of aunt Polly as a witness—to try finally if he could not break her off the project, though he felt it to be a forlorn-hope. He did not wish it to be said, by-and-by, by business people who would hear of the transaction, and comment on it, that she acted by his advice. He determined also to write to her; so as to leave on record, and set him right with his successors, a true statement of his views, his doubts, and his fears; for he felt that it would never do to leave these in any uncertainty. People would naturally say, "What on earth was Pipperly about when he let the girl perpetrate such folly?"—or, "The man was clearly guilty, morally if not legally, of a gross breach of trust,"—and so forth. He could not lie easy in his grave—much less in his bed—if such things were said. He was quite right, from every point of

view, in making his reputation as an honest sensible man of business, absolutely safe; therefore it was, that when he had written the letter, he carefully copied it into one of the big books, kept by him under lock and key, in the bank.

That Lavinia was her own mistress might be enough to satisfy herself; but, it would not satisfy others, or clear him in the estimation of the outside world, or of those whose good opinion he valued, not only as men, but as bankers, lawyers, stock-brokers. Honesty had always been his policy.

"You say, my dear, that this mysterious nabob, from the other end of the world, will turn up and make everything right; but suppose he doesn't?"

"Turn up?"

"No, make everything right. Suppose he declines to have anything to do with the place, or to take it off your hands—which I should say is more than likely——"

"Why do you say that? Why is it more than likely?" she asked, abruptly. He wasn't prepared, on the instant, with an answer, so she went on—"You say that, just because you want to convince me that I am doing a financially foolish thing—isn't that so? Now confess."

"Well, it is."

"But, where's the use, when I have told you over and over again that I know it, and, over and over again, that I still mean to do it?"

The pertinacious Pipperly still held out. "Are you aware that you may never be able to realise what you have to pay for the place? It isn't that you may get only one per cent for your money, but that you will perhaps practically sink the principal, hopelessly."

"Why, of course! Haven't I got it all clearly stated in your letter—which I mean to keep, and to refer to as my only conso-

lation when time declares you to be a true prophet — my truest and best of friends? But, all the same, I don't care."

"Don't care for what, Lavinia?"

"Don't care for the interest; don't care for the principal; don't care for anything, in fact, which stands in the way of my doing this insane thing. I must save Scottowe."

"Most extraordinary!" ejaculated Pipperly; "unaccountable — and you always were so sensible in business matters."

"Unaccountable to you perhaps from a business point of view; but——" she paused, and he listened anxiously, expecting an explanation. He was disappointed, as she concluded the sentence with the words— "never mind that!" This was as difficult to grapple with as her previous "So there!" still he could not let it pass with her, unchallenged.

"I can't help minding it," he said, with

a shade of annoyance in his tone. "Have you no influence?" he asked, turning, in his despair, to aunt Polly.

"Oh, none," replied she, promptly; "none whatever, Mr Pipperly. I have done my very best."

"You have both done it, of course—as I knew you would," said Lavinia; "and I feel very grateful and very obstinate. I won't press you, Mr Pipperly, to go there if you really would prefer not to. I don't want you to act against your will and judgment."

"Oh, but I'll do it," said he.

"If you don't, I'll have to do it myself—that's all."

The alternative alarmed him. She would be swindled right, left, and centre, if any human being but himself transacted her business. If he didn't pull her through, nobody else could, or should. So, after playing with the subject a little longer, in the vain hope of turning her from her pur-

pose, he finally declared that he had made up his mind to carry out her wishes to the letter, and to give her the benefit of his experience.

"Which has been of such service to me always," said Lavinia; "you ought to know how I value your opinion."

"Yet you have as good as told me, my dear, that my opinion is not worth a button."

"Now be just, like a dear, kind, good man as you are. Am I more unreasonable in being determined to purchase the place without seeing it, than you are in advising me against a purchase, when you have never been near it either?"

"It is not the place, but the paying away of your good money for it, that gives me so much trouble," said Pipperly, evading a direct reply. "But I'll go, all the same; and will look after your interests as keenly as if they were my own. You'll not pay too much, if I can help it."

"I feel as safe," she said, putting a hand kindly on the old man's shoulder, the touch of which sent a thrill of affection through his frame—he loved her so much all these years—"as it is just possible for any one to feel, when I am in your hands."

"I wish I had the same confidence in myself," said Pipperly, with a touch of that self-flattering depreciation to which we are all prone, and in which we indulge, no matter how self-opinionated we may really be, or how high an estimate we may have formed of our individual acumen. As a matter of fact, no one entertained a more exalted idea of his own business capacity and judgment than Pipperly himself; and—I may add—no one had a better right to such an opinion, based as it was upon years of prosperous management of a big banking concern: I respect him for it. I can therefore only conclude, that the remark was born of that peculiar

pride which apes humility; but I don't care for that sort of thing much. When a man has a good opinion of himself, he should always stand by it, and not make little of it.

If he hasn't that good opinion, he is, as a rule, less likely to be a bad judge than to have fair grounds for arriving at an adverse personal verdict. I am inclined always to think, that he must be indeed a shady character who despises himself.

Knowing Pipperly, therefore, so intimately, I must set down his little speech as a mere *façon de parler*. He didn't mean it to deceive himself or anybody else. Lavinia wasn't taken in by it, and did not therefore think it worth noticing.

This was her first grand chance of showing to Major Tynte that she was capable of making a big sacrifice (from a worldly point of view) to do what she thought would please him, or which would at least

show that—whether it pleased him or not —she had made an effort, as far as her lights went, to carry out in the most liberal spirit the letter of her promise to befriend the Scottowes. She did not say all this to herself; she did not stop to analyse her own motives; or to understand or weigh her actions. She simply felt an honest glow of pleasure and gratification in doing as she did. In affairs of the heart—

"Nemo in sese tentat descendere,"

says the satirist; and love leads reason blindfold.

Pipperly thought her altogether unwise; but wisdom is a relative term, and is justified of her children only. Lavinia was prepared to abide the issue, be it good or bad; and, out of the fulness of her faith, to take the consequences. She was absolutely determined to do all she could for the dear major, and for the wife of his friend.

Commend me to a woman when she makes up her mind to go solid, either for or against. Sense and reason bite the dust when her sentiment shows fight; and this is what makes the dear creature so strong in her very weakness. There is no danger which she will not face, no obloquy which she will not bear, no hazard which she will not run, when the heart impels. The rigid male hesitates to even compound a felony, and has been known to consult his conscience on the refunding of an income-tax which lack of moral fibre has led him in the first instance to evade. He will desert a *quondam* friend because of pecuniary defalcations, or an un-met six months' bill. I have known a weak-kneed father to declare, out of his uselessly superabundant honesty, that, as Jack was born on Easter-Sunday the first of April in such-and-such a year, he must not travel half-fare this year, after the 1st, though

Easter-Sunday does not come round till the 21st. I maintain, with the boy's mother, that he has a right to travel half-fare till Easter-Sunday next—his birthday—and that he has clearly more than a fortnight to run.

You say I must admit that "there are certain broad lines of——"

No; I admit nothing. I feel, of course, that I have weakened the major premiss by too much elaboration of the minor; and I will say no more except to end as I began: commend me to a woman when she makes up her mind.

In addition to the incentives which her own love for Major Tynte gave her, there were so many winning points of character about Kate, and so many touching circumstances surrounding the manner in which they had become acquainted, that she could not help feeling warmly attached to Tinkler's sister. Argument was simply lost upon her.

Aunt Polly followed Pipperly out, after the interview.

"You know," she said, "it is not really so foolish as it looks; because, in any case, if Lavinia marries Major Tynte—as I sincerely trust she will—she can keep the old house or sell it as her husband may advise by-and-by—that is, if her other plans should fall through, or become impracticable."

"Just so," replied Pipperly. "I must do the best I can for her under the circumstances. It is possible we may get a bargain. Let us hope so, at all events."

And with a warm parting—for they were on most cordial terms, as we know—he took his leave of aunt Polly, and went to his office-desk to write, by that post, to London for particulars as to title, valuation, rental, &c., &c., of Scottowe Manor and estate.

CHAPTER XI.

GENERAL.

"War is death's feast."
—FULLER'S *Gnomologia.*

EVENTS crowd themselves into the next few months. During this time the gallant deeds of the 201st were chronicled in the columns of the press, local and general, all through the varying stages of the small but tedious war, which cost so much in life and treasure. Lavinia lived in daily, hourly terror of some disastrous news, the possibilities of which she durst not face, even in imagination, though they hung over her like a pall; and Kate suffered equally. Each mail was eagerly watched for by both; and the priceless, loving, wistful letters—

written on scraps, with ink or with pencil, as the exigencies of the moment determined —were to a large extent interchangeable. Portions in praise of Scottowe were read by Lavinia to Kate; and a like return was made by Kate, anent the major. These letters became an additional bond of union — if one were needed — between the two women, the strong one and the weak.

But they were weeks old when the postman brought them; while there were horrid telegrams coming out every day, in large print, which made them seem older still, and terribly out of date. It was awful to think that they had chattered and spoken lightly—though not unkindly—about poor Lieutenant Spunner, who had been mentioned in the major's last letter in connection with some good-natured frolic, and then to see, in the morning paper the same day, his death recorded.

"O Kate! isn't it perfectly dreadful?"

Lavinia said, nervously crushing the newspaper in both hands.

After a good cry, they folded out the creases, and read and re-read the paragraph with their heads together; and then they cried again. Poor Spunner! This tribute was given to the memory of as honest and brave a fellow as you could find. The paragraph ran: "This brush with the enemy was altogether in the nature of a surprise; and we have to deplore the loss of Lieutenant Spunner, who displayed the most conspicuous coolness and bravery on the occasion."

It *was* "perfectly dreadful"—there could be no doubt at all about it; and it was very well that Georgie just came in at the moment. In her good-nature she had hurried off to Kate the instant she saw the news, because she was certain that Lavinia would do the same, and that they would effect no good by mutual "grizzling." She was quite right in one sense, but not altogether; because "griz-

zling" notoriously does do good to women when indulged in, in moderation. It was to ensure this moderation, perhaps, that she called so unexpectedly, and so much earlier than usual. She was safe; but Lavinia and Kate had staked their all of happiness on the issues of this war: and the terrible conviction was ever present with the two, that even while they talked and smiled, the loved ones might be gone, or be suffering excruciating agonies, deprived of that loving tenderness which a woman only can dispense at such a time. They felt it henceforth incumbent on them to be sad; or rather they discovered that it was impossible to be cheerful, since the death of Spunner.

There were all sorts of dangers to be anticipated; for the dusky enemy was not only brave, but cunning and hard to get at. They were ever on the watch behind cover, and seldom to be met in the open. They were excellent marksmen; and many

a brave 201st man fell by bullets sped from rifles of "Brummagem" manufacture, a supply of which had been sent out by an enterprising and patriotic "firm," which had an inkling in good time, through a local representative, that an outbreak was certain. It is well known and acknowledged all over the world that John Bull will always "push trade" whenever and wherever it can be pushed; and it is notorious also that he has pushed this nefarious branch of it, among our foes, more than once. It has ever appeared to me that if you supply a stranger with a weapon with which to kill your own brothers, and also make that stranger pay for the weapon, that you are not only a murderer but a skunk: I may be wrong, but I would lynch the man who did it. I question whether John Bull does not stand alone in this disgraceful traffic. Nay, more; he has even been charged by the stranger with outrageous swindling, in selling a deadly weapon

which as often kills the confiding purchaser as not. However, in the particular transaction to which we refer, there was no such insinuation; on the contrary, the "article gave great satisfaction," and with it the swarthy marksman only too often dropped his man.

In addition to the danger from home-made guns and cartridges, Tommy Atkins had to face wounds from poisoned spears and arrows, bad water, and the ravages of disease brought on by the fearful climate. Add to all these the fact that he could not rest safely even within the lines in camp at night; for these savages could see like cats, and creep noiselessly on all-fours, and kill poor Tommy while he slept, and dreamed of home and loved ones.

All the horrors and the dangers were minutely detailed by war-correspondents, and were graphically sketched by artists who were there and who were not. One's feelings and sympathies were naturally at white heat. Nobody knew what a day might bring forth

— though impartial minds had long since come fully to the conclusion that we had no right at all to be where we were, and deserved neither quarter nor pity; but pity is, as we know, extraneous to mere desert. It is, moreover, akin to love; and very close relations have always existed between Mars and Venus.

Philosophers of the cold calculating male order, may tell us that it is useless and profitless to grieve, and extremely unwise to anticipate evil, since you thus suffer many times, instead of once, or happily not at all; for the evil may never put in an appearance. You should not cry out, either, these wise men say, before you are hurt. I dispute that. People are never tired of inculcating the precept as being the essence of wisdom. I maintain that the truest philosophy of life, more often than not, consists in crying out before you are hurt, in blowing the trumpet —your own, of course—well in advance; and there seems to me to be far more sense in

this course than in crying after you are hurt. The most intellectual dog I ever possessed acted always on this principle, and I never knew his tail to be trodden on, though he often got sympathy and reward. I don't think so much of philosophy as it does of itself. It is very easy to be a Stoic in theory. All you have got to do is to sit in a porch and preach; if it is somebody else's porch, all the better.

It would have been utter folly to try and reason with these two terror-stricken souls, and Georgie knew this, though she was not a philosopher; but she was sensible enough to instinctively feel that, when the emotional and the sentimental come together, they make sad havoc of wise saws and modern instances. It was impossible that either Lavinia or Kate could shut out from their thoughts, the possibilities that any moment might reveal. Georgie knew, too, that Kate was in that critical state of health

during which sudden shock might prove dangerous; hence it was that she went in for routing them up, and set her face against "moping." Captain Tiptop had succumbed to fever some considerable time previously, but his death did not touch them like the other; and they were just settling down to discuss together the moral and religious aspects of the question as to which kind of death was preferable, when Georgie cut short the lugubrious discourse.

She had come to be a very frequent and welcome visitor at the curate's lodgings—and not more welcome to Kate than to the Rev. Joseph Tinkler himself. There was no need of formal paying and returning visits; she just dropped in when she felt inclined—which was very often—to see Kate. She said so, and Kate believed it. Morose people maintain that no real friendship is formed or can exist between women. This is a gross libel. It existed between these

three, and yet they were as different as three persons well could be. Making due allowance for the fellow-feeling, I am asked to look closely into this friendship, and I shall be certain to find—a motive. Well, what of that? The real point is whether the motive is an estimable one or not. I doubt whether Kate had any. A naturally affectionate unintellectual woman may fall into this state with absolutely no motive, as I fancy Kate did. We have accounted for Lavinia's, which was strong enough to induce her to make what Mr Pipperly called a "big pecuniary sacrifice for sentiment": her loss was its own reward. Georgie went into the mutual admiration business because Kate was Joseph's sister.

I am always hard on Georgie, and yet I don't mean to be. If she had, as we know, fully determined to marry Joseph Tinkler, after all it was far and away the best thing that could happen to him; and undoubtedly

she had, like Lavinia, acted nobly through the social conflict which had raged so bitterly about the advent of his sister, and her equivocal position, for so many months. She—to use a vulgar but expressive phrase—stuck to them through thick and thin; through good report and evil report—or rather through the latter only, for there was nothing else. Was she not entitled to her reward? If she was content with such small change in the matrimonial market, who but the reverend gentleman himself had any right to say her nay? She deserved to win; and I for one should be sorry if she didn't, because she never wavered for an instant; and when the tide turned, and Mrs Quodlibet came from the palace in her carriage, and called on Kate, it was only natural that Georgie should feel a glow of triumph, and should take the first opportunity of encountering Mrs Fungus, and stamping on her.

It was astonishing how this great scandal now dwindled and disappeared from the Westerly tea-tables. It got quite worn out by dint of rough usage and knocking about. Like any other dirt, calumny sticks for a while, when it is thrown; but let it dry, and you get rid of it easily. Some delicate textures suffer; but the everyday material does not show any stain worth noticing. The Rev. Septimus Stole, whether instigated by charity or by his diocesan, preached its funeral sermon, in this particular instance, in Westerly Church; and wound up his discourse by quoting the bishop's favourite author, that most generous-souled and human-hearted of divines, old Fuller: "Of those of whom thou canst say no good, say nothing; of those of whom thou canst say some good, say no bad;" concluding with the remark that it would all be so easy if only this advice were followed by "those who profess and call them-

selves Christians." The discourse produced a most favourable impression; but Mrs Fungus did not think it quite seemly that so young a man should preach personalities, and deliver an all-round lecture from a self-erected pedestal of superior virtue.

She thought it probable that the Canon would, before the girls, and out of the fulness of his disregard for Stole, agree with her as to its not being quite the thing; and so he did, but his standpoint was a different one from hers.

"A self-sufficient young fellow like that," he said, "generally manages to talk nonsense. Of course we all know it would be easy enough, if it were easy—but it isn't. As a matter of fact, it is directly the reverse."

Not having been present, he was unaware that his sweeping condemnation of Stole involved an indirect censure on a greater than he. Dolly, the younger daughter—who had a tender regard for Stole, because

of his beautiful eyes—enlightened her father by explaining that the preacher was merely quoting Dr Fuller; but the explanation was not received in good part, and was not satisfactory as an emollient.

"You don't know what you're talking about," was all the thanks she got; "or *he* doesn't, one or either. Fuller did not say it was easy: he merely laid down a precept, and did not draw an inference. In any case, he addressed himself to men—as men: he knew as well as I do, that women must gossip and chatter, and will do it to the end of the chapter."

"Well, in any case," said Mrs Fungus, endeavouring to change the line of argument, "I don't see that Tinkler has much to complain about. Everybody has subscribed to this bothering testimonial till we are all sick of it. There is a very large sum collected."

So there was. People got ashamed of

themselves for having taken an unkind and uncharitable view of the situation; and having fully enjoyed the satisfaction which of right belongs to scandal-mongering, they now went in for the counter-enjoyment which comes of a chastened repentance, and laboured hard to show contrition. It was wonderful to hear people talk, and to discover, now, how few there were who "ever really believed it," and how many there were who had their "doubts from the first," and so forth. Every one was eager to show how he or she had been early in the field in upsetting the foul calumnies which had been circulated, and which nobody owned.

But if Mrs Quodlibet had not come to the rescue in her carriage-and-pair, Mrs Fungus and her satellites would have run down and completely overwhelmed not only Lavinia but Georgie also, in their joint efforts to keep Kate's reputation out of the mud.

Georgie was dreadfully handicapped, because, in addition to Kate's, she had also to look after the Rev. Joseph's reputation, which might suffer by implication; and the subscriptions, which might suffer too, if the process of stamping out was not thorough. There was a complete and most satisfactory turn of the tide. The period of tension was over, and those who did not give in time, now gave doubly.

The hour was almost ripe for Georgie to make a bid not only for victory but for triumph; when a postponement was rendered absolutely necessary by the performance of a function at which Dr Collyrium presided and officiated with his usual skill and kindness.

A young Scottowe put in an appearance, claiming a vast amount of attention, and awakening a large share of interest. Fortunately, the event took place in Tinkler's

absence. He had to go to his new church to "read himself in"; and, while in the parish, he learned the news, and was advised by the doctor to prolong his stay for a few days, as "the women would be better without him" till they got things in order at his lodgings. He found plenty to occupy his time and thoughts about the church, the rectory, the schools, and the parish generally; and had, moreover, to look for a man to do temporary duty for him, as he did not see his way to going into residence for some considerable time. The house required "doing up" and papering and painting; furniture had afterwards to be got—and so on. He "put up" for the time being at the rectory of an adjoining and hospitable brother clergyman—a free-and-easy old chap, who, to Tinkler's horror, let things slide pretty considerably, and had no taste or ear for music—so that the choir under his con-

trol was simply excruciating. The old man "lived like a fighting cock," had no family, a retinue of servants to look after his wife and himself, and a well-stocked cellar and stable. He very kindly placed a horse and trap and man at his guest's disposal, so that a week passed rapidly enough. Tinkler went to see the historic old family mansion of Scottowe, which was, as we know, in the market; and he found it in possession of a nice old lady, who had been sent down by the Courts in London, to take charge of it. She was very stiff and cold—so much so that the timid Tinkler didn't venture to be more than distantly respectful and polite—she seemed so much above the humble office which she filled, and the duties of a caretaker.

It gave her something to do, she explained, in her loneliness. He was sorry to be obliged to face the fact that, when the

place changed hands, he would be deprived of her invaluable aid.

He found that she had done something for him in the schools for which he thanked her again; but this she made no compliment of, and only regretted that she could not do more. A strange creature he thought her as he took his leave; and what a sad life she must have all by herself in that big silent house! To be sure, there was an old doddering man-servant about the place, paid also by "the Courts"; but she was not likely to derive much satisfaction from this, he thought—merely a sense of security. If Tinkler had any insight into human character he would have known that, as far as any sense of security went, she and the man might safely change places; for he trembled in his bed at night — hearing strange sounds, groans, and ghostly footsteps in the long corridors overhead, and

believing firmly that the house was haunted, and that the woman up-stairs was uncanny.

When Tinkler went back to his rectory and let himself, with the latch-key, into his own big empty house—looking doubly desolate from its utter lack of furniture—he shuddered involuntarily. What should he do there by-and-by, all alone—for years perhaps—a bachelor? Was there not a way out of the difficulty, or was it a difficulty at all?

The tongue turns ever to the aching tooth; and when the heart is troubled there are emotions which will not let it rest, but must keep probing on. There was no cure for Tinkler's ailment but Georgie: of that he became more and more convinced the more he thought about it.

If she had only known what his feelings

were, what a lot of bother it might have saved—to say nothing of loss of time. Beating about a bush is often a tiresome process; but you must sometimes do this—not only to ascertain if the bird be there, but also to rout it out when it is.

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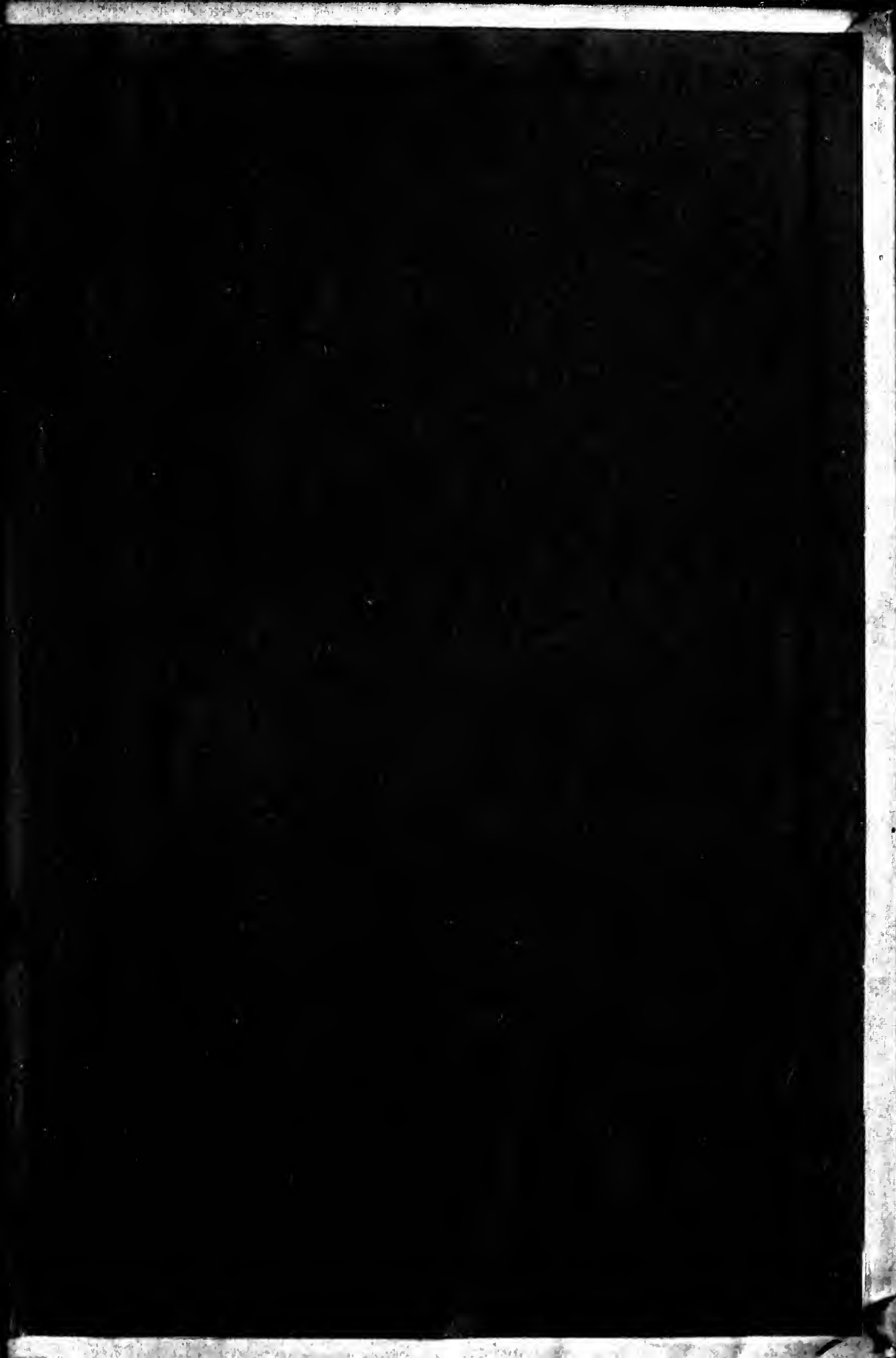

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